

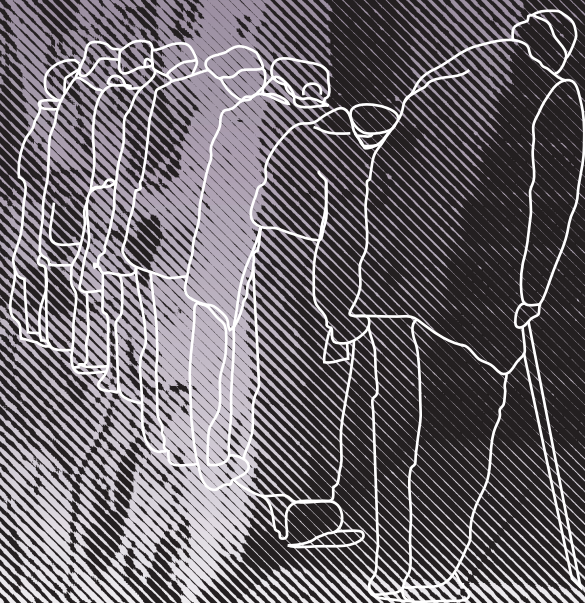
QUEST for a SUITABLE PAST

Myth and Memory in
Eastern and Central Europe

Edited by

CLAUDIA-FLORENTINA DOBRE

CRISTIAN EMILIAN GHIȚĂ



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*Myth and Memory in Central
and Eastern Europe*

Edited by
CLAUDIA-FLORENTINA DOBRE
and
CRISTIAN EMILIAN GHIȚĂ



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224 West 57th Street, New York NY 10019, USA
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Fax: +1-646-557-2416
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Foreword

To History, myth is a challenge, a practically endless territory just waiting to be deforested and marked out. In its fullest and most profound meaning, myth is the expression of the great beliefs that animate a community—any community, including humanity in its entirety. It has accompanied humans from the dawn of history to the present day and will continue to do so. Man is a creature that needs to believe in something that extends beyond banal day-to-day existence. It is of no consequence how true or untrue that myth happens to be, for it is beyond the realm of regular truths or lies.

A myth serves multiple purposes. It explains: it gives meaning and coherence to the world, to society, to historical developments. It also provides legitimacy: to polities, states, nations, ideologies, political regimes, social projects... They all appeal to a wide range of foundation myths. Not least, a myth provides a sense of direction: it reunites people around certain values and projects and pushes them in one direction or another. In short, myth sets history in motion.

The past may be approached from a variety of directions. That is why, to a single history there correspond numerous reconstructions of history. Mythological perspective is among these and is one of the most promising. In its own language, it may provide a complete historical picture, substantially enriching the possible interpretations.

The present volume is a contribution in this direction. These contributions should be seen as only a beginning, the point of departure in a much-needed collective investigation dedicated to the myths and mythologies that have accompanied the history of Eastern Europe and its nations.

Lucian Boia

Introduction

Myths are embedded in our societies' cultural memory. Cultural memory, as defined by Jan Assmann, is "a kind of institution based on fixed points in the past" (Assmann 2010b, 113). This past is not preserved as such but is cast in symbolic figures animated by memories (Assmann 2010a, 47). "Cultural memories are maintained across generations by societal practices and institutions such as texts, rites, monuments, commemorations, symbols" (Manier and Hirst 2010, 253–254).

"Cultural memory is a form of collective memory (as defined by Halbwachs),¹ in the sense that it is shared by a number of people and that it conveys to these people a collective, that is, a cultural identity" (Assmann 2010b, 110). Cultural memory transforms the past into an object of remembrance and finally into myth (Assmann 2010a, 47). Myth is a re-enacted, socially remembered story about the beginnings, a narration meant to illuminate a changing present (Assmann 2010b, 114–115).

¹ Maurice Halbwachs showed that individual memory depends on socialization and communication, that it is always a reconstruction of the past according to the needs of the present or influenced by the present in a dialogical interaction with others (Halbwachs 1997). The collective memory has a performative dimension, and it is shaped by memorial social frameworks (*les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*) (Halbwachs 1994).

Myths fill important roles as tools for national/local/collective self-definition and identity transfer, as agents of social cohesion, as vehicles for the transmission of cultural and ideological values, and as legitimizing narratives for various political movements and regimes (Schöpflin 1997, 22–26).

Myths have always been present in the life of groups/communities and societies. In ancient societies, they played an important role in explaining the world and the existence of various beings populating it, while providing a normative framework for communities' everyday life. Despised in ancient Greece as works of fiction, they were nevertheless *loci* of cultural memory. Christianity brought about a new approach to myths, which were depicted as the opposite of the sacred *logos*.² Developing this opposition, the Enlightenment dismissed myth as “untruth” and “unreal” (Bottici 2007, 131). However, despite their relegation to “un-truthfulness,” myths remained important in the debates that shaped the ideals of Western European critical thinking and rationalism.

Myths took on a new life once anthropology was set on firm academic grounds. The anthropologists contributed decisively to the change in the perception of myths. Lévi-Strauss saw myth as universal—something that could be grasped by people around the world (1958, 232). Mircea Eliade (1963, 15) defined myths of ancient societies as “sacred histories” narrating an event that took place at the beginning of historical time. Eliade insisted that each time a myth was told, the sacred time of the events narrated in the myth were, in a sense, brought back to life (1994, 70–71). What is more, by narrating the exemplary deeds of supernatural beings, myths put forth an ideal of human conduct (Eliade 1963, 18). Bronisław Malinowski went further, arguing that in archaic societies “myth... is not merely a story told but a reality lived” (1992, 100).

Myths occupied a well-defined place in the life of archaic societies, as anthropologists have shown. By contrast, modern society has banished mythical thought as a matter of principle but proved unable to do away with myths completely. Cornelius Castoriadis pointed out that no society can survive without symbolic constructs that give meaning to its social life. For Castoriadis, Western society, modern and postmodern, seems to

² Myths are fluid and subject to perpetual transformation and multiple readings, in contrast with the Christian sacred *logos*, which is stable, permanent, and unique (Bottici 2007, 20–43).

exhibit to an even greater degree the work of the social imaginary, at once instituted and instituting (that is to say, itself structured by existing historical factors while at the same structuring the emergence of novel practices and ideas) (1975, 174–248). Even in the guise of ideological and nationalist narratives, myths preserve their status as fundamental beliefs that can confer meaning upon the imagined destiny of the community.

Myths as a mode of representing the past provide access to a system of interpretation and a model of social conduct (Boia 1998, 40–41). They build creatively on a narrative core so as to meet the demands for making sense of the world (Bottici and Challand 2013, 91). Furthermore, myths are crucial instruments in cultural reproduction (Bourdieu 1993). They play an important part in defining boundaries between communities or within the community. Myths are encoded in rituals, liturgies, and symbols (Schöpflin 1997, 20).

Building an adequate conceptual framework is indispensable in the analysis of myths (Girardet 1997, 5). The challenge is that no analysis can exhaust the range of meanings of mythical thought and its embodiment in the cultural memory of a given community. Worse yet, any deconstruction of old myths is liable to give rise to new myths, because myth (as memory) is essentially a narrative (re)construction informed by the concerns of the present.

This volume, *Quest for a Suitable Past: Myth and Memory in Central and Eastern Europe*, deals with the problematic interplay of myth and memory in Central and Eastern Europe from the nineteenth century to the present. It analyzes the complex process whereby some elements of the past are transformed into myth, as well as the role of myths in the political and social life of the region. It focuses on a number of case studies illustrating the connection between communicative memory (in the sense of Jan Assmann)³ and myths (as elements of cultural memory) in creating national/local identities and/or legitimizing ideologies using a *longue durée* perspective.

The case studies collected here show that myths were often instrumental in the vast projects of social and political mobilization during a period that has witnessed, among other things, two world wars and the

³ “Communicative memories are socially mediated, based in a group, and transmitted across a community by means of everyday communication” (Manier and Hirst 2010, 253).

harsh oppression of the communist regimes. Yet another common theme throughout the papers is that the mythological dimension of modern societies continued to play a role in the twenty-first century, inasmuch as the new political/national myths reused many of the symbols that defined the earlier mythology.

The analysis of the rather complicated process of myth-making in Central and Eastern Europe, a region with a unique historical trajectory over the last hundred years, gives a fuller picture of the role of myths in establishing the European social imaginary, complementing the findings of studies about Western Europe. In particular, the present volume can be read as a complement to *Myths and Nationhood* (Routledge, 1997), a general survey of European historical and political myths. Several of the individual contributions in this volume build on Lucian Boia's *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness* (Central European University Press, 2001). Other contributions engage with the ongoing debates about the construction of a shared European past, a topic recently discussed by Chiara Bottici and Benoît Challand in *Imagining Europe: Myth, Memory, and Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 2013). The chapters on communist and post-communist myth-making aim to take further the insights of Vladimir Tismăneanu in *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe* (Princeton University Press, 2009).

That said, the volume is not intended as an all-encompassing treatment of the subject but instead aims to give a new impetus to the role played by myth and memory in the modern and post-modern social imaginary of Central and Eastern Europe. Nor is it meant to offer a normative definition of myth. For such definitions vary not only from the historian to the sociologist (for example) but also within the same academic discipline. By avoiding rigid definitions of myth, the contributions collected in this volume have focused more closely on the multifaceted nature of Eastern European political/national myths, with a particular emphasis on Romania, a country that is under-represented in studies of contemporary political mythologies. In this sense, the volume aims to fill a substantial lacuna in the existing scholarship.

The contributions to the volume have steered away from the facile course of reducing myths' multifaceted ambiguity to some sort of essence. Since myth is sometimes defined, in the spirit of Roland Barthes, as a system of communication that traverses the centuries (Barthes 1997, 235),

some studies have drawn attention to the capacity of myths to acquire new meanings over time and transform themselves in new historical contexts, in which they are used to serve various political and social projects. Another way of looking at myths is as important elements of cultural memory transmitted from one era to another through ideological discourses and cultural practices.

Thus the papers of this volume use myths as an entry point not only into the larger sociopolitical issues but also into historians and sociologists' production of knowledge, with particular reference to the myth-making potential inherent in the elaboration of meta-narratives, be they national, pan-European, or multi-disciplinary. Several contributions converge in suggesting that the perpetuation of some national myths in public consciousness reflects the limited impact of present-day historians' efforts to educate the larger public. Conversely, the need for more nuanced analyses that shift between different perspectives, however unsatisfying these might seem to lay audiences fed on catchy formulas and sound bites, also emerges as a common theme throughout the papers.

Gábor Egry's contribution, "An Obscure Object of Desire: The Myth of Alba Iulia and its Social Functions, 1918–1940," emphasizes the role of memory and ideology in constructing national mythologies. His study argues that the starting point in the myth-making process (i.e., the manufacture of the unity myth) was the shared memory of the Great Assembly of Alba Iulia on December 1, 1918. As early as 1919, a mythological discourse of the event was developed by Transylvanian Romanian political players, gradually turning those events into their own reading of national history and a redefinition of the nation. At the same time, the Liberals of the Old Kingdom developed a counter-myth that highlighted their role in the unification of the nation and served to legitimize their rule, also supported by a distinct reading of national history. Meanwhile, splinter groups of Transylvanian Romanian politicians and the leadership of the Hungarian minority offered a different reading in order to substantiate their political demands. The competing versions slowly became foci of politics of identity dealing with the issue of the relationship of the Old Kingdom and Transylvania, asserting that Romanians from these provinces had a substantially different group character. Furthermore, the myth of Alba Iulia was used to develop a new, organic, and transcendent concept of the nation, with the Transylvanian Iuliu Maniu, the "hero" of Alba Iulia, as its destined leader. The study shows that the myth of Alba

Iulia (the myth of unity) had a powerful simplifying role and was modulated by a drive to manufacture ideological legitimization.

The process of political/national events' transformation into myths and their role in defining national identity is also analyzed by Neven Budak in his contribution, "Croatia between the Myths of the Nation-State and of the Common European Past." The chapter discusses the power of myths to cut through the ages while accumulating new meanings, transforming and evolving depending on the time and place. Throughout the history of Croatia, myths have been instrumental in forging a sense of identity and in justifying political positions. The endurance of several myths can be attributed to their flexibility, as they were adopted by several regimes and adapted to suit their particular needs. Moreover, myths have a component of ambiguity, which allows, for example, the coexistence of two mutually exclusive concepts: Croatia is seen, on the one hand, as the bulwark of the West, and on the other hand, as a bridge between East and West, and North and South. The mythological discourse adaptation to evolving realities is a permanent process, as old myths are harnessed to bolster Croats' European integration.

The fluid content of historical myths and their ambiguous contours come under scrutiny in Izabela Skórzyńska and Anna Wachowiak's contribution, "Deconstructing the Myth of the 'Wicked German' in Northern and Western Parts of Poland: Local Approaches to Cultural Heritage." The study analyzes myths as discursive practices closely connected to the identity and cultural memory of Polish local communities. It describes and interprets changes in Polish attitudes towards German heritage in Poland after 1989 that occurred through local commemorative and civic practices related to "symbolic domains." Monuments, signboards, and cemeteries in Szamocin, Gdańsk, Wrocław, Szczecin, Wesoła, Nakomiady, and many other places all over Poland play an important role in redefining the image of the Germans, and in the reconciliation process between Germany and Poland, as well as in debunking the older myth of the evil German. This national myth, which embodies stereotypes and ideological elements, shaped the life of Polish society in the last few centuries, proving remarkably enduring.

Ideology was (and still is) the driving force in creating, maintaining, and transmitting political, national, and cultural mythologies. When the personal is ideologically fashioned, myths can play an important part in

identity constructions and identity transfer. Ștefan Bosomitu's contribution, "Mythologizing the Biographies of Romanian Underground Communists: The Case Study of Miron Constantinescu," shows that under communism even public individual identities were constructed according to a mythological scheme and loaded with mythological elements. The author analyzes the function of myths in publicly validating the position of high-ranking communist officials. Examining different types of sources (biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, and secret-police files), the author seeks to outline a method through which one can reconstruct the mythological elements of a communist militant's biography. Bosomitu uses the concept of "myth-biography" (Costea 2008) to define the communist propaganda that transformed the biographies of the underground militants into a standardized ideological discourse loaded with commonplaces such as a "healthy social origin," revolutionary precocity, early commitment to the workers' movement, and imprisonment by the secret police. Focusing on the case of Miron Constantinescu, an underground communist who rose to prominence after World War II as a key figure of the communist regime in Romania, Bosomitu shows that autobiographies and memoirs can be loaded with mythological elements meant to fit a personal trajectory into an ideological discourse and, at the same time, used to transmit new mythological discourses.

Communist mythological discourses were sometimes perpetuated after the fall of this regime. Luciana-Marioara Jinga's study, "Women in the Communist Party: Debunking a (Post-)Communist Mythology," investigates both the post-communist socio-political function and the historiographical ramifications of the myths surrounding the role of women within the Romanian Communist Party. As early as 1946, the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) introduced what was called "egalitarian legislation," striving to meet the demands of Marxist-Leninist doctrine and taking the USSR as a model. In order to apply these principles to Romanian society, communist propaganda encouraged women to join the paid workforce. Despite the propaganda and the egalitarian legislation, the presence of women within the RCP was, for the first three decades of communism, one of the lowest of all the communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In the mid-1970s, Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime introduced mandatory quotas for the participation of women, as members and candidates, in all party structures. The program achieved little: the rate of women joining the party did not rise at all from the previous period.

In positions of authority, except for the small group surrounding Elena Ceaușescu, female participation remained modest. The article shows that the ideological myth of women's over-representation and negative impact in communist-era politics does not stand up to careful scrutiny, particularly when confronted with the archival record; nevertheless, it still influences the political life of post-communist Romania.

The perpetuation and the transformation of national myths of the communist era during the transitional period are analyzed by Claudia-Florentina Dobre in her contribution, "Avatars of the Social Imaginary: Myths about Romanian Communism after 1989." The author argues that myths played an important part in legitimizing the transitional political regimes and in constructing new social and national identities after 1989. The chapter illustrates the continuity of old myths as well as their adaptation to the new context. For example, the myth of conspiracy is still present in Romanian society, albeit in different forms, as well as the myth of a golden age. The process of creation of a new myth of origins is also under scrutiny. The "Revolution" myth as the ground zero of a new political order embedded all the elements of a new political mythology. The study shows that post-communist myths are deeply rooted in the cultural memory of Romanian society, as their origins can be traced to the nineteenth century, the era of the national paradigm's construction.

A similar conclusion informs Liliana Deyanova's contribution, "Post-Communist Politics of Memory and the New Regime of Historiography: Recent Controversies on the Memory of the 'Forty-Five Years of the Communist Yoke' and the 'Myth of Batak.'" The study emphasizes the role played by myths embedded in the cultural memory of Bulgarian society and in the historians' production of knowledge. Deyanova shows how contemporary historians have become complicit in the perpetuation of the mythicized, nineteenth-century nationalistic view of Bulgarian history, focusing on a case study, the myth of Batak. Another crucial aspect analyzed by Deyanova is whether researchers hold sufficient autonomy and public influence to oppose an ideological approach towards the communist past (which tends to be mythicized in a negative sense) such as the one rooted in what was called the "normalization of communism." In Deyanova's view, present-day researchers lack the political channels and positions that would enable them to publicly deconstruct the old national meta-narrative as well as the new canonical narrative on communism and thus to resist political pressures on the writing of academic history.

These themes are echoed by Alexander Nikolov's critical survey of the mythologized discourses on the early Bulgarian past that may be found in academic history, in collective memory, and in the new media ("The Phenomenon of 'Parahistory' in Post-Communist Bulgaria: Old Theories and New Myths on Proto-Bulgarians"). While for the past two centuries, historians have been instrumental in creating national myths, in today's post-national age they face the opposite imperative of deconstructing national grand narratives. In doing that, they run the risk of replacing one meta-narrative, rooted in nineteenth-century nationalism, with another, highlighting the common European past as the backdrop of today's united Europe. Nikolov's study also emphasizes that the democratization of historical interpretation, facilitated by the Internet, can lead to "parahistorical" perspectives in which critical thinking and intellectual rigor are cast aside. Furthermore, the recent proliferation of myths about the origins of the Bulgarian people can be read as a symptom of a national identity crisis in the new context of a globalized society.

To conclude, the studies gathered in this volume emphasize the heuristic value of myths, as well as their importance in constructing and deconstructing broad historical, cultural, social, or political paradigms. They make an immediate contribution to the understanding of the social imaginary in which local communities and/or nations have operated in the last two centuries in Central and Eastern Europe.

Analyzing myths as part of the cultural memory of Central and Eastern Europe is particularly important. The region has experienced its fair share of historical drama and social division after 1989 and turned to myth-making as a possible remedy for societal rifts. Myths were produced and/or actualized in order to create social consensus and/or to overcome cultural trauma. Sometimes myths perpetuate a nationalistic paradigm that hinders the national, inter-regional, local, and even European consensus. Debunking these myths became of paramount importance in order to help the Eastern European nations regain their political and social compass.

Claudia-Florentina Dobre

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Gábor Egry

An Obscure Object of Desire: The Myth of Alba Iulia and its Social Functions, 1918–1940

An ordinary revolution

To see a huge crowd gathered to declare the independence of a nation and/or establishment of a new state was not uncommon in Eastern Europe in the fall of 1918. Revolutions swept the region and profoundly changed the political map. Alba Iulia, a small city in Transylvania, was one such place. The Kingdom of Hungary, part of the dualist Monarchy, collapsed under the weight of its defeat in war and the incapacity of an already exhausted administration. The army disintegrated; soldiers headed home, albeit not without their rifles; and the peasants expelled the local bureaucracy.¹ Ethnically mixed groups of peasants stormed local pubs and stores, burned tax registers, appropriated the villages' common property, and confiscated the land of rich owners (Lăzar 2000). Order was gradually restored as local National Councils were established. These served as more or less unrestricted authorities in the villages until the beginning of 1919 (Egry 2010, 97–98). In many cases, ethnic differences

¹ At the end of 1919, one year after the rally of Alba Iulia, the prefect of Turda-Arieș County reported that not one village hall was spared from destruction and, out of the sixty-eight village notaries, only two or three remained at their posts. Information from the Romanian Central National Archives (hereafter ANIC), “Ruling Council” database, General Police Section (hereafter GPS) (Siguranța Generală, Poliția și Jandarmeria). Folder 3/1920, Files 250–252.

were no obstacles to cooperation in managing local issues, and retrospectively the National Councils almost universally thought of themselves as instruments of a revolution (Egry 2010, 97–98).²

The subsequent events transformed a social revolution into a national one. A mass assembly (*Adunarea Națională*) (of around 100,000) at Alba Iulia on December 1, 1918, declared that the Romanians of Hungary would join Romania. Beyond the declaration of popular sovereignty, the resolution spoke of the—temporary—right of the province to be governed according to its customs and the right of every nation (primarily Romanians, Hungarians, and German-speaking Saxons) to be governed by its own people. It promised rights for minorities (including the use of their mother tongue in the administration, the right to their own schools, and the right to be judged by their own judges). Furthermore, it reasserted that the newly erected Ruling Council (*Consiliul Dirigent*) was the only legitimate representative of the Romanian nation (*Magyar Kisebbség* 1922).

In the weeks and months that followed, the *Consiliul Dirigent* made an effort to consolidate its position and to reorganize the province. In this effort it acted as a *de facto* government and even saw itself as a sovereign power.³ Furthermore, it played an important role in the political life of Greater Romania when the parties from the new provinces won the first elections to Parliament and Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, one of the main participants in the Alba Iulia declaration, was installed as prime minister. The more accustomed to this situation Transylvanian politicians grew, the more shocking its abrupt end was. When Vaida-Voevod's successor, Alexandru Averescu, dissolved the Ruling Council in March 1920, its politicians felt they were deprived of their rightful administrative body and share of power.⁴

However, 1918 was never forgotten, either by Transylvanian politicians or by the other public actors of Greater Romania. The events of

² Maria Bucur emphasizes the ethnic conflict as the crucial element of the memory of this short period, while in the light of frequent ethnic cooperation, it seems more accurate to lay at least similar emphasis on the revolutionary aspect (Bucur 2001, 292–293).

³ Alexandru Vaida-Voevod to Iuliu Maniu, April 28, 1919 (Leuștean 2002, 189).

⁴ The central power in Bucharest sought to strengthen the position of the state in the newly united territory but also to consolidate the Romanian nation-state. The large number of minorities frightened the politicians of the Old Kingdom, who wanted to build a homogenous nation (Boia 2014).

that year were seen by its main protagonists as a national revolution with three main aspects. It was democratic, as the masses expressed their will; national, as it brought about the realization of the national demands; and unitary, in the sense that no true Romanian dissented. The Assembly included everyone: peasants, the middle class, and workers. As a result, the ensuing activity of the Consiliul Dirigent became just as important as the mass demonstration. It was conceived as the realization of the Wilsonian principle of self-determination (Bucur 2001, 287–298) and self-rule, and the Consiliul Dirigent was treated as the only legitimate government of the Transylvanian Romanians.

In the subsequent years, Alba Iulia evolved into a symbol beyond its particular locality. The event that took place there encompassed values, emotions, and significances far beyond its initial connotation, becoming the expression of a new mythological construction. In the next two decades, mythicizing was an instrument of politics, with farther-reaching consequences.⁵

The Alba Iulia myth: The symbolic center of all Romanians

The “National Assembly of Alba Iulia” was living memory throughout the interwar period. Most of its leading personalities were active and prominent figures in public life, just as many of the “ordinary” peasant participants were still alive. The fact that so many people could have had personal memories of or at least could have heard about the events from participants was probably a factor in the mythicizing process, and it underlines how much this myth was a social construct, developed through the interplay of conscious and intentional interpretation and the popular memories of the event.

December 1 was duly commemorated every year (Dragomir 1927) but still contested and reinterpreted. Originally it was mainly the concern of Transylvanian Romanians, whose cultural organizations played a pio-

⁵ For the purpose of this essay, I will define myth as a strong historical concept that refers to the past in order to deal with the present; therefore, its real object is the latter. Its aim is to legitimize and delegitimize, through the construction of a community of destiny (i.e., through allegedly common history), and as a consequence it is often teleological and uses a series of personalities and places as symbols and lieux de memoire.

neering role in setting up festive events. Though the Old Kingdom media and elites initially neglected the day, the tenth anniversary was greeted with wide media coverage, and the first uniform nationwide commemorations were held in 1938, as a symbol of the unifying strength of the king's dictatorship (Bucur 2001, 292–294, 297, 299–300).

However, it was not this sometimes mechanical ritual that reinforced the myth, but politics, the attempt of mainly Transylvanian Romanian politicians to develop a political discourse in which a mythologized version of the Alba Iulia event played a central role. These politicians belonged to either the Romanian National Party of Transylvania (from 1926, part of the National Peasant Party) or the People's Party. Vehemently opposing the actions of the dominant National Liberal Party, they resorted to the memory of Alba Iulia as a core symbol of their legitimacy, of their capacity to govern and administer the province, developing a complex symbolic system that encompassed the entire—Romanian—history of Transylvania.

The historic references of this mythological system included a sixteenth-century prince of Wallachia, Mihai Viteazul (Michael the Brave), who simultaneously ruled Transylvania, Moldova, and Wallachia for a short period. Alba Iulia was the seat of Transylvanian princes and thus the “capital” of the “first unifier of Romania.”⁶ Furthermore, it was the site of a Roman city, a fact that invoked the concept of the Romanians' Dacian-Roman descent. These were important links to an already canonized national history; the main tenets of the newly developed mythology were consciously different, referring to the Great Assembly's character as a mass demonstration, its social composition, and its regional scope.

These mythological and historical elements were bound together in the concepts of freedom and revolution and situated in an unbroken chain of freedom fights. As most Transylvanian Romanians were peasants, and had been serfs before 1848, while the majority of their overlords were

⁶ Michael the Brave was and still is considered in the Romanian mythological discourse to be the first unifier of Romania. In 1918, Michael was already well established in the historical canon of the Old Kingdom; his statue served as the permanent destination of Heroes Day commemorative marches (Bucur 2009, 106). Since 1928, laying a wreath on the statue was part of the official commemorations of December 1 too (Bucur 2001, 299–300). Thus his figure offered the chance to both link Transylvania's history to Romania's and to appropriate the national history for Transylvanians.

Hungarians, liberation from serfdom and the rights of the nation were conflated. Revolts and demonstrations were portrayed as eruptions of a millenary vision of a free and united Romanian nation (e.g., *Chemarea* December 6, 1931). This discursive strategy was deployed with references to Horea's revolt (a peasant riot that took place in 1784 in some parts of Transylvania), to the 1848 Revolution in Transylvania and to Avram Iancu (the Romanian leader of the 1848 Revolution), to the electoral clashes during the dualist era, and to the Great Assembly. In this sense that was a logical conclusion of a linear story of national emancipation.

Emancipation also meant elevating the peasants and breaking the power of their oppressors. As interwar Romania was an agrarian state, the social composition of the participants became more important. The fight for both types of liberation was translated into a value system seen as inherently Transylvanian Romanian and dubbed "democracy." Being a Transylvanian peasant imposed a moral obligation to fight for freedom. A striking example is found in a letter written by Iuliu Maniu (the National Peasant leader) to the patriarch who served as prime minister during the king's dictatorship, Miron Cristea. Maniu accused the prelate of a coup d'état that would destroy spiritual values and expressed his dismay that it was a "Transylvanian, a former political friend, and a son of a Romanian serf" who would dismantle democracy.⁷

From this angle the unity of the country was different too. The Assembly was a manifestation of self-determination and the founding moment of Greater Romania. It overcame the barrier of the Carpathians but did not entail subordination or the surrender of Transylvanian rights for self-determination (Bucur 2001, 296–298). According to Maniu, Cristea took an oath at Alba Iulia to defend Transylvania's rights, and his collaboration with the dictatorship was still a betrayal of this oath and of those rights affirmed two decades earlier.⁸

The initial myth of Alba Iulia absorbed the past but was closed towards the future—the nation's aims were achieved. However, with the desperate political struggle between the Liberals and their opponents,⁹

⁷ Iuliu Maniu's alleged letter to Miron Cristea from February 16, 1938, Bucharest, ANIC, General Direction of Police (hereafter GDP) 67/1926. Folder 74–77, File 75.

⁸ Ibid., Files 75–76.

⁹ For a detailed account of the political struggle between the National Party and National Liberal Party, see Ciupercă (2010).

the mythological discourse was extended beyond 1918. As Maniu put it in 1928, the Romanians of 1918 thought that their unity would be enough to elevate them and “the National Peasant Party’s reason for existence has ceased.” But it was in vain (*Ellenzék* May 1928, no. 104).

Furthermore, the myth was suitable for re-enactment, which also enabled a reinterpretation of its content without affecting its core concepts. The newly established National Peasant Party held a new assembly at Alba Iulia on May 6, 1928. Already the contemporaries considered its significance beyond its political content (Buruiana 2007, 204), and the National Peasant leaders emphasized its epochal importance. They insisted that at Alba Iulia they could overturn the government and install a National Peasant one (*Românul* December 4, 1927). It was an intentional re-enactment to finish what was left unfinished, organized as an imitation. Politicians toured the countryside urging the peasants to attend. Some of them took the trouble to make a proper pilgrimage, like Cluj University professor Emil Hațieganu, who traveled on foot (*Ellenzék* 49, no. 101, May 6, 1928; no. 102, May 7, 1928).

The rally was only a shadow of the original intention. Although the peasants and workers in attendance were passionate, the political change failed to take place. Despite the heated speeches, the declaration that the Liberal government was illegal and against the will of the people, and an oath taken to fight the government with every means, the party remained in opposition until November. Some nearby villages saw scenes similar to those in 1918, but order was soon restored.¹⁰

Nevertheless, 1928 occupied a very important place in the developing mythology. Besides the re-enactment, it represented a new substance, a logical conclusion of the half-success of 1918.¹¹ Unity was redefined as the unity of the Romanian people and their representative, the united National and Peasant Parties, and the liberation of Old Kingdom peasants.¹² The assembly was more than imitation: it achieved and consecrated the unity of the nation’s core, the peasantry. In the National Peasant Party discourse, the 1928 rally was even more important than the 1918 events;

¹⁰ ANIC, GDP, Folder 3/1928, Files 16, 21.

¹¹ Teodor Roxin’s speech at the National Peasant Party’s Bihor County organization’s congress, October 6, 1935. ANIC, GDP, Folder 104/1935, File 13.

¹² Aurel Dobrescu’s speech in the conference room, Dacia Traiana, November 3, 1935, Bucharest. ANIC, GDP 104/1935, Files 152–159.

in the 1930s it was proclaimed to be one of the most important events in history.¹³ As the journal *Chemarea* put it: “We, the young generation of the National Peasant Party, took the oath at Alba Iulia along with everyone. This oath was solemn, and it was sacred. We swore to fight for the good of the nation” (*Chemarea* 1929). The oath of 1918, binding its subjects eternally, was complemented with a new one that brought more people into the community of a solemn oath.

Alba Iulia had become the symbolic center of the nation. It had been gradually transformed into a myth connected to the history of the nation, symbolizing every major peasant attempt at liberation while serving this purpose in the present, too. The attending masses were presented as revolutionary both in 1918 and in 1928,¹⁴ while the two rallies were depicted as the true expression of popular will.

During the interwar period, the Alba Iulia myth slowly transformed into a circular teleology and identified itself with the myth of unity. Unity was a recurring event from the Romans to 1928 and Alba Iulia the place of its manifestation. However, both its content and its participants varied over time. Michael the Brave was a sixteenth-century military ruler. The masses of 1918 were Transylvanian, with every social group represented, liberating itself. The crowd of 1928 was seen as consisting of every Transylvanian Romanian and all the peasants of the Old Kingdom. It was an evolution of the extent of the nation through the mutual emancipation of groups that had previously been split.¹⁵

Alba Iulia served mainly a regionalist political agenda. It was a Transylvanian event, the result of the Transylvanian ethic; it proved the Transylvanians’ central role in the nation’s liberation and the importance of their democratic sentiment and morality, and it was the basis of a series of regionalist political claims.

¹³ Valer Moldovan’s speech at the congress of the National Peasant Party’s Bihor County organization, October 6, 1935. ANIC, GDP, Folder 104/1935, Files 11–12.

¹⁴ A report in the *Times* characterized the situation in the country as revolutionary (MTI Napi hírek 1928).

¹⁵ Although not in an identical sense, the issue of the “wholeness” of the nation became central for all of the interpretations of December 1 in the 1930s (Bucur 2001, 301–302).

The counter-myth: Transylvania liberated

The Old Kingdom Liberals were not satisfied with the National Peasant Party and Transylvanian mythology of Alba Iulia and Greater Romania. They were eager to suppress it and replace it with another one. The process started in 1922, when the Liberals organized the coronation of King Ferdinand as king of Greater Romania in Alba Iulia. A far-reaching campaign throughout Transylvania preceded the ceremony, with Prime Minister Ionel Brătianu and his ministers holding rallies in the cities and festive events related to the agrarian reform.

These actions were aimed at the foundations of the original myth of Alba Iulia. The coronation symbolized the idea that Greater Romania was born out of the Liberals' policies, while the ritual overwrote the revolutionary symbolism of the city. It was a symbolic appropriation, all the more successful when the National Party announced its withdrawal from the festivities. The festive distribution of land attacked the legitimacy of the National Party too, linking the Liberals with the liberation from Hungarian estate owners, who sometimes appeared at these festive events as petitioners in order to preserve some of their estates.

The National Party justified its absence by declaring the Liberal government illegitimate, as having originated from fraud and violence. To counterbalance the government, the party also organized mass rallies, usually on the heels of the Liberals. The heated verbal clashes that started in the autumn of 1922 lasted for almost two decades. While the Liberals spoke of a bright future and a new era, the National Party listed the grievances of Transylvanians and soon resorted to stigmatization, portraying the Liberals as aliens to Transylvania and to the nation, oligarchs exhibiting byzantine behavior, and dictators. Vaida-Voevod asserted that if they had known the true nature of the Liberals, they would not have offered unconditional unification.¹⁶

¹⁶ "A Románia magyar kisebbség sérelmei 1922/10" [Grievances of the Hungarian minority in Romania 1922/10]. Magyar Országos Levéltár (Hungarian National Archives) (hereafter MOL), registration code: K 28, 4, cs. 10, 1923–T-85. 30. Mihai Grofşorean characterized the Liberals as those who "learned from the Russians how to demoralize, from the Bulgarians how to take revenge, from the Greeks how to lie, and from the Poles how to sneak."

As the Transylvanians forged their own reading of national history, the Liberals deployed a concurrent one, based mainly on events in the Old Kingdom, helped by the fact that December 1 did not resonate with the Old Kingdom population. Their cities had other traditions of commemorating the nation's history and another story of national unity, culminating in January 24, the unification of Moldova and Wallachia in 1859. The Old Kingdom press scarcely mentioned December 1 and at the same time gave detailed coverage to January 24 (Bucur 2001, 293–294; Bucur 2009, 110). The prelude to the second Alba Iulia was a repetition of 1922, with the roles reversed. The Liberals followed National Peasant rallies in the main cities of the country (Buruiana 2007, 214–215) presenting their history by putting Iași and 1859 at its center. This alternative story of national unification (Buruiana 2007, 217–218) portrayed them as the only representatives of every Romanian.

The main point of contention was who liberated Transylvania. While Transylvanians insisted that the liberation was the result of their own efforts and a logical conclusion of historical events' evolution, the Liberals emphasized the role of the Old Kingdom (Bucur 2001, 296–297). An editorial in *Clujul Românesc* (May 1928) summed up the conflict succinctly: the peasants who rallied at Alba Iulia came not because of National Peasant leaders but because of the symbolism of the place. Alba Iulia was a symbol of unification, something not achieved by Maniu or National Peasant leaders but by every Romanian soul. Furthermore, Alba Iulia was a symbol of the crown, but the party that insisted on being the sole representative of the nation had not been present at the coronation. The interpretation of Alba Iulia was an issue of legitimacy, and as such, it was hard to find a compromise interpretation (Lengyel 2007; Livezeanu 1995).

Complementary versions: Transylvanian dissidents and Hungarians

Minor groups also developed somewhat different interpretations of Alba Iulia. They shared the conviction that the National Assembly of Alba Iulia was a unique event of great historical importance, an expression of popular will and Transylvanian distinctiveness. The first such group contained National Party dissidents. They were disappointed by the Liberal Party but hoped their Old Kingdom allies would oust it. The first of the dissidents was the poet Octavian Goga, who joined Take Ionescu in 1919

and followed him to Averescu's People's Party. The party was in government in 1920–1921 and in 1926–1927. During its second tenure, he was joined by other prominent Transylvanian Romanian politicians, like Vasile Goldiș and Ioan Lupaș, who rejected the merger with the Peasant Party and claimed that Goldiș was the rightful party chairman.

Averescu refused the regionalist demands but was still inclined to provide Transylvania with some administrative autonomy. The Transylvanians in his party offered another vision of national unity, with the war hero field marshal at its head and the Transylvanians as its backbone. Averescu suppressed the 1907 peasant revolt, but his wartime record was sufficient to portray him as a strong man who would lead the country out of chaos.¹⁷

The discontent with Liberal rule and the regionalist undertones of grievances inflicted upon Transylvania by the Old Kingdom enabled them to step up as saviors of Transylvania while distancing themselves from National Peasant intransigence. Lupaș noted that the presence of nine Transylvanians in the government constituted a rehabilitation of Transylvania and condemned Maniu and Vaida-Voevod for remaining absent from the coronation, echoing a Liberal accusation (*Clujul Românesc* April 25, 1926). Nevertheless, the main demand of the former National Party politicians was that of a Transylvanian self-government of the kind proclaimed at Alba Iulia in 1918, and a reconquest of the province (*Clujul Românesc* May 9, 1926). Goldiș swore that he—the one who authored the text¹⁸—would remain faithful to the declaration of Alba Iulia to his death. His new party declared that Maniu consciously abandoned the National Party's true—Romanian—nature, implying that the new party was the true heir to Alba Iulia (*Ellenzék* May 5, 1926).

This claim—although dubious—was accepted by the Hungarians, who developed their own interpretation. While the dissidents focused on Transylvanian Romanians' self-government, the Hungarians spoke of and pointed out the passages about minority rights. As Liberal rule did not bring about the implementation of these rights, the Hungarians saw

¹⁷ He was even called the Hindenburg of Romania (*Clujul Românesc* 6, no. 14, April 4, 1926).

¹⁸ Actually, the declaration was discussed and formulated together with others, including Ștefan Cicio-Pop and Ioan Suci, but it was written down by Vasile Goldiș.

in Alba Iulia a chance to assert them. In order to do so, they had to accept Alba Iulia as a legitimate act of popular sovereignty.

It is telling that the Hungarians' journal on minority issues reproduced the Alba Iulia declaration in one of its first issues. Many Hungarians sought to forge an alliance with the National Party on the basis of Transylvanian self-government (Lengyel 2007). In this context the declaration was the foundation of autonomous Transylvania, in which every nationality was to rule itself. However, the first political alliance was concluded with Averescu in 1923 using Goga as an intermediary.¹⁹

The Hungarian Party renewed the pact in 1926 and greeted the dissidents with enthusiasm. The visit of ministers to Cluj was seen as a start of a new era, one that would benefit every Transylvanian nationality (*Ellenzék* May 22, 1926). During the electoral campaign the party chairman referred to Goldiș as the author of the Alba Iulia declaration, as someone committed to its generous and righteous spirit (*Ellenzék* May 17, 1926), and insisted that the Transylvanians in the government were the guarantee of a better future.

This sentiment was later transferred to National Peasant governments. Maniu was similarly greeted in Transylvania's capital. One Hungarian newspaper even speculated that Maniu ordered the postponement of the December 1 festivities in 1928 because he wanted to realize its promises before celebrating its memory (*Ellenzék* December 3, 1928).

A series of setbacks and disappointment with the Peasant Party could not easily eliminate this hope of a common cause of Transylvanians against foreigners. As late as 1932, Hungarian newspapers asserted that Vaida-Voevod should be proud of having been accused by Liberals of chairing a "Magyarized" government, something the Hungarian newspaper saw as a natural outcome of common Transylvanian traditions (*Ellenzék* 1932). Nevertheless, the spell of Alba Iulia did not last much longer. In December 1933, party chairman György Bethlen asserted that the National Peasant governments were the most horrific for the Hungarians. After claiming that Maniu, at the anniversary of Alba Iulia, ripped open the wounds of the minorities, he read the Alba Iulia declaration's passages on minority rights, redressing unfulfilled claims.

¹⁹ For the political strategy of the Hungarian Party, see Bárdi 1999.

Legitimacy, identity, group construction, social mobilization

The myth of Alba Iulia had several social functions during the interwar period. The differing interpretations were aimed at creating legitimacy for certain institutions, policies, and groups, strengthening individual identification and hence helping construct the given group. Teleological in its form, it was the foundation myth of Greater Romania (the state), of the National (National Peasant) Party, and of an imagined Transylvania, its inhabitants a specific group. Given the many competing group-construction and state-building projects in interwar Romania (Livezeanu 1995), the contested nature of this myth was not surprising. The myth became a source of legitimacy for those who were able to demonstrate knowing the true meaning of the assembly, being true heirs to it.²⁰

The different and changing positions of parties and politicians determined their relationship with the unfolding myth too. The dissident group of Transylvanian politicians started a struggle for the heritage of Alba Iulia. National Liberals attempted to construct a new myth of the locus that could deprive the original of its legitimizing force.²¹ The main aim of minorities was to gain concessions regarding minority rights.

Alba Iulia offered several lines of argumentation, all of them implying acceptance of the core of the myth: that the assembly was a legitimate expression of the popular will. First, they could claim their own form of national self-determination, which was legitimized in the case of the Saxons by their own similar event in early 1919 in Mediaș that supported Romanian claims for the province.²² Second, the declaration promised

²⁰ It was understood by the contemporaries, too. A 1935 police report noted that Old Kingdom Peasant Party politicians were well aware of this delegitimizing effect. "În jurul întrunirii național țărăniștilor ardeleni. Sursa serioasă" [On the meeting of the National Peasant Party from Ardeal: A credible source], November 4, 1935. ANIC, GDP, 104/1935, Files 160–161.

²¹ This process is detailed in Bucur (2001) but is interpreted as two different ways of remembering the war.

²² In the first decade, Saxon politicians and publications used to refer to the declaration and the rights it promised. However, after the emergence of Nazi Germany and the gradual Gleichschaltung of the Saxon community, self-determination in its Wilsonian sense lost its meaning. Saxon separation was derived from the German-ness of the group that made Alba Iulia obsolete.

minority rights in Greater Romania. Third, the Transylvanian nature of Alba Iulia offered minorities the chance to align themselves to the regionalist programs.

Given the nature of the political conflict and the involvement of the masses, it is not surprising that issues of identity gained significance. Parties relying on mass support sought to stabilize their voter base, and strengthening group consciousness offered one solution that was easily reinforced by personal experiences of the difference between Transylvanian and Old Kingdom Romanians. Old Kingdom Romanians were regarded (or, more accurately, disregarded) as different in manners and behavior and hopelessly alien to the province. But they held the power in the common Romanian nation-state, another factor of identification. Hence the rivals constructed their respective own groups in order to delegitimize and exclude their opponents, while asserting their legitimacy as representatives of the common group: the nation. Thus Transylvanians were defined and delimited, while the region itself was assigned different places in the symbolic geography of the nation.

The relationship between Transylvania and the Old Kingdom was essential to the myth of Alba Iulia. The event and its re-enactment became foci of legitimizing discourses, absorbing issues like Transylvania's liberation and its claim on self-governance. Two distinct Romanian nations emerged from the two different parts of Greater Romania, with different qualities ascribed to Old Kingdom and Transylvanian Romanians. The recurring demonstration of the popular will at Alba Iulia underlined the democratic nature of Romanians, incorporated into the National Peasant version of the myth. Transylvanians claimed they were always free, not like the oppressed Old Kingdom Romanians.²³ Freedom was not simply a legal fact but a type of people: brave, self-conscious, aware of their duties, fighting for their rights—the exact opposite of the subservient byzantine oligarchy of the Old Kingdom.²⁴

This characterization was assumed to be inherent to Transylvanian Romanians. However, while the Liberal oligarchy from the Old Kingdom

²³ MOL, P1077, vol. 3, 282.

²⁴ Caius Brediceanu to Iuliu Maniu, April 7, 1919. ANIC, Database Vaida-Voevod, Folder 47, Files 1–2; Alexandru Vaida-Voevod to Iuliu Maniu, April 2, 1919. ANIC, Fond Vaida-Voevod, Folder 45, Files 1–14.

was excluded, peasants were incorporated into a different nation.²⁵ This was the constituency the National Party and Peasant Party tried to mobilize, and not without success. The negative everyday experiences with Old Kingdom Romanians led to generalizations,²⁶ and the discontent led to eruptions of violence, especially in 1928. After the investiture of Maniu's government, the chief of the State Security in Lugoj encountered deep hostility. He reported insults to Old Kingdom officials in the streets; someone even stormed into his office and shouted: "Polenta-eater, go back to your Old Kingdom polenta."²⁷

The events of 1928 mobilized not only the memories of national conflict but also the revolutionary aspects of 1918 (Bucur 2001, 292–293). Overturning state authorities was the proper repetition of what happened in the fall of 1918. Although the memory of 1918 was nationalized, the experience the unhappy Transylvanians tried to resurrect was not greatly imbued with the aspect of nationality. One remark by captured insurgents from Mogoș exemplifies this assumption. They explained that they proclaimed the autonomy of Transylvania at Alba Iulia (May 6, 1928) and this meant that no one ruled them anymore.²⁸

The formation of a new nation did not stop at the redefinition of its geographical extent. The myth's core elements—national, democratic, and unitary—pointed to a different concept of the nation, an integral, organic one that was represented by one destined leader, whose legitimacy depended on Alba Iulia: Iuliu Maniu. Democracy was understood as the liberation of peasants from economic and political oppression (*Românul* January 1, 1927). The latter meant to enable them to express their will free of the Liberals' fraud. If they succeeded, they would certainly support their true representatives, the National Peasants. These elements help us in decoding the myth of unity between the people and its representatives, too.

²⁵ For example, Ion Mihalache asserted that the National Peasant Party rediscovered the true Old Kingdom Romanians (namely the peasants, a myth that still endures in Romanian culture), with whom they would build a new Romania (*Ellenzék* December 7, 1928).

²⁶ The local peasants even wrote songs about the miseries brought about by Old Kingdom officials. ANIC, GDP, 56/1921, Files 57–59.

²⁷ Polenta—corn porridge—is the main food of poor Romanian peasants. Hungarians frequently insulted Romanians as "mămăliga eaters" (*puliszka zabáló*). ANIC, GDP Folder 56/1921, File 173.

²⁸ ANIC, GDP, Folder 3/1928, File 21.

Peasants were united with their true representatives; any attempt to sow the seeds of discord in Transylvania was an exception to the rule (*Românul* January 1, 1927). The party that grew out of Alba Iulia—an eternal expression of the singular national will—was the only legitimate representative of the people and the region.²⁹ The aim of the policies was the realization of the authentic existence of the nation, when “the political state is identical with the nation-state and the interests of those governing are identical with the interests of those governed” (*Chemarea* December 15, 1931).

With the dissidents’ failure to appropriate Alba Iulia, Maniu remained as the true and only symbol of Transylvania. Signs of a personality cult around him were visible as early as 1919, and this cult strengthened by the time the party took power. When he had to step down as prime minister in 1930, he was treated by his followers as a saint-like figure. He even earned the veneration of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the future leader of the fascist movement (Haynes 2007). Party organs characterized him as the priest of the “civic religion” of “harmony of state and nation” in a Transylvania that “live[d] in the religion of Iuliu Maniu,” with Alba Iulia, where “he shook up the ancestral land” in 1928 (*Chemarea* December 15, 1931). He rebuked Hungary’s revisionist claims in Parliament, asserting himself as the legitimate representative of Transylvania and Banat due to his role at Alba Iulia and in the Consiliul Dirigent. Beyond his prominent position, the assumption highlighted an organic, essentialist concept of the nation and national democracy. Maniu at Alba Iulia unleashed the popular will and proved that he was the destined leader of the nation forever. Every re-enactment served as the confirmation of this eternal fact through the ritual, but what counted was more subtle than a simple ritual, something almost transcendent. Maniu and the sacred place where he and his nation recognized their destiny in each other was, the symbolic center of the nation, where it realized—literally and figuratively—its destiny.

During the 1930s the myth of Alba Iulia and the cult of Maniu were fused, and Maniu personified the history and the nation. In political speeches it was implied that Maniu alone went to Bucharest and liberated the Romanian peasants.³⁰ A transcendental aspect of the nation

²⁹ As the journal *Chemarea* (December 15, 1931) put it, in the eyes of the peasants, the national peasant government was the only national government since the unification.

³⁰ Aurel Dobrescu’s speech in the conference room Dacia Traiana, November 3, 1935. ANIC, GDP, 104/1935. Files 152–159.

was revealed in 1938, when he asserted that Transylvanians were bound together by a kind of essence.³¹ His followers celebrated his birthday in 1939 with speeches mentioning him as the “savior” of the nation. Maniu did not shy away from the task and replied: “What do I represent in this moment? Gentlemen, I represent my Romanian nation, and I represent specifically Transylvania, in whose name to speak no one else is entitled, except me, as no one else has the right to do it.”³²

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³¹ ANIC, GDP, 67/1926. File 75.

³² Maniu’s speech at Vintu de Jos on January 24, 1939. ANIC, GDP, 67/1926. Files 87–88.

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Neven Budak

Croatia between the Myths of the Nation-State and of the Common European Past

If we examine the narratives of the Croatian past as they have been recorded throughout history, we notice that in all periods, from the earliest attestation of the ethnonym “Croatian” in the ninth century until the most recent times, mythology played an important role in the creation of Croatian national memory and thus in conceptualizing Croatian self-identity. The first two such myths, regarding the very origins of Croats, were written down by Byzantine authors, particularly Constantine Porphyrogenitus in his *De administrando imperio* (Porphyrogenitus 1949, 122–153). Others were composed later, in the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, while several were the result of nineteenth-century professional historiography.

What should be discussed first is the relation between myths produced in different periods and especially the difference, if any, between myths created by pre-modern writers of history and modern, professional historians.

Defining a myth is a difficult task, because there are many such definitions. I will therefore simply go back to Mircea Eliade’s definition: a myth communicates a sacred story; it describes an event that happened in primordial times (Eliade 1970, 9–10, 20–21). It explains the “beginnings”—be they the origins of the universe, of a people, or of an institution—by describing the actions of supernatural heroes. It is a “holy story” and therefore not subject to any doubt. By repeating a myth, some com-

munities believed that they were invoking the presence of the heroes or recreating the primordial act of creation (Eliade 1970, 16).

Such a definition may not be perfectly adequate for explaining historiographical myths, mainly because these tend to illustrate more than just the moment of creation of a nation (people), social group, or institution. They also justify claims to certain rights, political or territorial. However, I would argue that even so, historiographical myths contain elements that make them comparable to “real” myths. They tell stories not to be doubted, containing unquestionable truths. They discuss people, individuals, or groups who achieved something in the past that is of great importance for the myth-tellers and their audience. In this way, these predecessors from the distant past become some kind of supernatural heroes. The act of repeating mythical stories by telling them or reading them, by presenting them in pictures or on monuments, and finally by organizing commemorative ceremonies and introducing them into the educational system is intended to revive the past and to enable the listeners/observers/participants to identify themselves with their mythical ancestors, gaining additional strength and self-confidence.

As I have mentioned, the oldest forms of a Croatian historical or historiographical myth can be found in *De administrando imperio*, a work edited, if not written, by the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus in the mid-tenth century. This work actually contains two explanations of how the Croats came to Dalmatia and how they conquered this province, which was to become their homeland. Both are written in the form of an *origo gentis*, a mythical story explaining the origins of a nation.¹ In both of these cases, it is not the origin of the “original” Croats that the authors try to explain but rather the beginnings of the history of the Dalmatian Croats, who are presented as descendants of those living somewhere in the north, in Great or White Croatia.² The stories differ in a number of important details, although they follow the same pattern: Croats come to Dalmatia, find the province in the hands of the Avars, fight against them, and conquer the land for themselves. One version, unanimously declared by scholars to be the older one, gives credit for this Croatian

¹ On the *origo gentis* as a textual type: Wolfram (1990, 19–33) and Wolfram (1995, 40–53).

² For a recent survey on the literature regarding the origins of the Croats, cf. Dzino (2010).

action to the seventh-century emperor Heraclius, who is supposed to have ordered the newcomers to fight against the Avars. The more recent version was composed shortly after the first had been written down, perhaps only a few decades later. According to it, five brothers and two sisters led a part of the White Croats from their northern homeland to Dalmatia, where they found the Avars and successfully fought against them.

Many medievalists considered the latter to be the genuine Croatian national myth (in the sense that it was created by the Croats themselves, unlike the previous one, which was a result of Byzantine ideology) and gave it priority over the former version, which, they argued, must have been invented by Constantine himself in order to claim the right of Byzantine suzerainty over the Croats, since they ruled their land by the will of a Byzantine emperor. According to their logic, the second story would have been older than the first. It is plausible, nevertheless, that this second version was composed at a time when relations between the Croatian rulers and the Byzantine court changed in favor of the Croats, whose help was once again needed in the wars against Bulgarians (Ančić 2010, 133–151). So to please the Croatian ruler, who also received a crown and the title of king of Croatia and Dalmatia, a scholar at the court in Constantinople was instructed to invent a more suitable version of the Croatian conquest myth, which was then included into Constantine's work, curiously without omitting the older narration.

We shall never learn who exactly commissioned the composition of this story, or in what ways it was used after it was written down. We also have no idea about the potential sources used by the Byzantine historian, but it is unlikely that he used a story extracted from Croatian folk tradition. Did this story ever reach a Croatian audience? This story probably never left the shelves of the Constantinopolitan court library, since there is not the slightest trace of it in any subsequent Croatian source. In that case, one could argue that since it was not read or recounted by anyone in Croatia, it was not really a myth. On the other hand, a segment of the narrative—included in both versions—was known in Croatia/Dalmatia: it was the story about how the Avars (and the Slavs) had taken Dalmatia from the Romans. The story tells us how the Avars (who are sometimes also called Slavs) captured Roman soldiers coming from Salona, the capital of Dalmatia, to guard the frontier on the Danube. They took their uniforms and ensigns and, deceiving the Roman outposts, entered Salona without fighting. They sacked the city and thus conquered the whole of Dalmatia.

This story is, of course, far from what actually happened, but we can find it in similar versions in later Dalmatian histories, the most famous of which was written in the thirteenth century by Thomas, the archdeacon of Split.³ This means that, contrary to the story about the origins of Dalmatian Croats, this one has survived for centuries in Dalmatia. It was used to reinforce the sense of identity felt by the people inhabiting the cities and their territories, especially those on the islands, because, according to this description of events, the Romans had been driven by the invaders into their fortified towns and onto the islands, as well as into mountainous regions of the Dalmatian hinterland. So by virtue of their Roman origins, the Dalmatians differed from their Slavic neighbors. We do not know how this myth was presented to the broader population, if at all, but given that it is recorded over a long period and in several independent sources, I would argue that it was a popularly accepted myth, although not Croatian in the narrower sense. It became Croatian only in the nineteenth century, when national historiography incorporated the history of Dalmatia into Croatian national history, following the first attempts in this direction by early modern historians (e.g., Johannes Lucius in his *De regno Dalmatiae et Chroatae libri sex*, Amsterdam, 1666). The Slavic invasion of Dalmatia in the seventh century was seen until recently as the formative action of the Croatian medieval realm and thus as the origin of Croatian history per se.⁴ Only in the last few years have scholars begun to question this picture (which goes back to a tenth-century Byzantine author), arguing the improbability of a great Slavic invasion of Dalmatia in the seventh century (Dzino 2010, 223–241).

The first phase of genuine Croatian myth-making was in the fourteenth century.⁵ It was a period of instability, caused by the ambitions of the Angevin kings to impose their authority on the Croatian lords who, for some time, ruled Croatia and Dalmatia almost independently of the waning power of the Arpadian dynasty (Budak and Jurković 2001; Budak

³ An English translation and commentary with bibliographical notes on all editions was published by Damir Karbić, Mirjana Matijević Sokol, and James Ross Sweeney in 2006 (Thomas of Split 2006).

⁴ Among the many histories of the Croatian Early Middle Ages, three are most revealing on this question: Šišić (1925), Klaić (1971), and Goldstein (1995).

⁵ By “genuine myth-making,” I mean the production of myths by the Croats themselves, i.e., by their elite, most probably its clerical members.

and Jurković 2003). To understand the story better, one has to go back more than two centuries, to the end of the eleventh and the beginning of the twelfth century. At that time, the Croatian throne was empty, because the last king, Stephen III, had died without an heir. Basing his claims on his sister's marriage to Zvonimir, the previous king who had also died heirless, the Hungarian king Ladislaus invaded Croatia in an attempt to gain the crown. However, Byzantine diplomacy, concerned for the security of the Dalmatian towns, persuaded the Pechenegs to attack Hungary from the north, thus forcing Ladislaus to withdraw without accomplishing his goal. A decade later, his nephew, Coloman, managed to become king of Dalmatia and Croatia under unclear circumstances (Budak 1994, 111–127).

His successors showed less interest in the affairs of the kingdom, thus enabling Croatian lords to gain more power and finally independence. This changed when the Italian branch of the Angevins ascended to the Hungarian throne. Feeling threatened in their previously undisturbed position, the Croatian lords had to find an excuse for the evil fate that had befallen them. So the story was invented that Zvonimir decided to respond to the pope's call to lead a crusade into the Holy Land, but his subjects opposed the idea so strongly that they killed him. Dying, the king cursed the Croats, wishing on them that they would never again have a king of their own nation (King Stephen III, who ruled for just two years, was obviously forgotten by the mid-fourteenth century). In this way, fourteenth-century lords explained why they had to suffer under the pressure of the Angevins.⁶

Their own subjects, the Croatian gentry, also invented a story in support of their efforts to have their noble status recognized. For a long time, they were oppressed by the mighty lords who wanted to convert them into serfs. Now, when a strong king appeared, wanting to crush the power of the lords, both sides found an interest in supporting each other. King Louis organized a county (*županija*) in central Croatia, and the gentry living there organized itself into what was called the "twelve Croatian kindreds." To support their claims to nobility, they invented the story about how, in 1102, their representatives had elected Coloman as king of Croatia by their own will. In turn, he exempted them from taxes

⁶ On the legend about the assassination of King Zvonimir, see Goldstein (1984), Rokay (1997), and Bratulić (1997). In support of the idea that the legend actually represents a reliable report of events and that Zvonimir was indeed invited by both the pope and Emperor Alexius to join the crusade, see Frankopan (2004).

and other privileges typical for the late medieval nobility. The text is preserved in one of the manuscripts of Thomas's *Historia Salonitana*, and it is best known under the name *Pacta conventa*.⁷

Both these stories—the one about the death of the alleged last Croatian king Zvonimir and the one about the twelve noble clans who, by their own will, became subjects of the Arpadian king—in the next few centuries became arguably the most important Croatian myths, explaining the political position of the Croatian nobility throughout the late-medieval and early-modern periods. Gradually, the Croatian identity of the lesser nobles was confirmed by the Croatian Diet (*Sabor*), which consisted of the lords and higher nobility. Whenever the members of the Diet were not satisfied with their rulers, they referred to the myth about the free election, threatening that they could decide to choose another dynasty instead of the one in power. They had no means to carry out these threats, but they were obviously retelling the story in order to build their self-confidence (or to console themselves in their inability to undertake real action) (Budak 2002/2003, 135–155).

It is also interesting that both myths found their inspiration in the turbulent times surrounding the extinction of the line of Croatian “national” kings and the beginnings of the long-lasting incorporation of Croatia into the lands of the Hungarian Crown of St. Stephen. Thus they also represented a reflection on a particular type of “beginning.”

In this way, the myth invented to support the lesser nobility against the lords became a founding myth for the lords themselves and for the entire Croatian nobility. Given that in the sixteenth century, the kingdoms of Croatia and Dalmatia, as well as of Slavonia, were reduced, as a consequence of the Ottoman conquests, to “the remnants of the remnants” (*reliquiae reliquiarum*), the diets of both kingdoms were united. Later, the Slavonian nobility accepted the myth as their own and adopted the Croatian identity. This was a long-lasting process, ending only in the eighteenth century (Beuc 1985, 190–194; Budak 2007, 81–82; Budak 2000).

⁷ The literature on *Pacta conventa* is immense. The best overviews can be found in Antoljak (1980) and Raukar (2002, 28–33). Raukar follows the opinions of Milan Šufflay, Nada Klaić, and other authors who believed *Pacta* was composed only in the fourteenth century, while Antoljak represents those researchers who are convinced that it tells the true story of the events and should be dated to the very beginning of the twelfth century.

The first common history of Croatia, Dalmatia, and Slavonia, written by the Slavonian George (Juraj) Rattkay in 1652, does not contain the myth of the election, although it does mention the one about Zvonimir's death (Rattkay 1652, 57).⁸

The difficult situation in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries resulted in the creation of yet another Croatian myth that would prove to be enduring and adaptable to very different political situations and ideologies. It was the myth of Croatia as the bulwark of Christianity.

This myth was discussed in detail some years ago by Ivo Žanić, who documented its existence as early as the sixteenth century. In 1523, Count Krsto Frankopan held a speech in Nuremberg, before the Diet of the Holy Roman Empire, describing Croatia as the outer wall or bulwark of the Christian Austrian borderlands, Istria, and northern Italy (Žanić 2003, 161–202). Žanić showed that this myth was employed in different periods and under different political systems. It was used by Croatian or Illyrian national revivers in the first half of the nineteenth century, though in a modified way: since at that time the Ottoman Empire presented no threat to Christianity, nationalist ideologists turned to the Mongol invasion from seven centuries earlier, creating the myth of a decisive Croatian victory over the invaders—a victory that saved Europe. Some Croatian politicians and intellectuals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century used the motif of the bulwark to illustrate how Croatia was defending Serbia and the Slavic Southeast from the German threat. During the Ustaša regime of 1941–1945, the idea of an outer wall was revived, but this time it was turned against the Bolshevik danger coming from the East. Perhaps the most interesting example comes from 1952, when on two occasions Tito stressed that Yugoslavia, by defending itself from the Soviets and their satellites, was like a rock defending the Western world. As Žanić states, this motif of a rock defending the West was simply a variation on the old myth of Croatia as an outer wall of Christian Europe. Of course, the wars of 1991–1995 provided an excellent occasion to revive the myth, but Croatian propaganda had to readjust it, as the wars were changing their character. In the beginning, while Croats and Bosnian Muslims were fighting together against the Serbs (to sum up the events), it was more appropriate to depict a bulwark against a communist—that is, Serbian—threat. Later,

⁸ On Rattkay and his writings, see Bene (2001).

as the Croats started fighting against a part of the Bosnians, it became possible to talk again about defending Christian Europe or the West against Islamic terrorists. In the postwar period, the myth, it seems, lost its practical value, but that does not mean that it will be forgotten forever.

Žanić also showed that there was an opposite myth, in which Croatia, rather than being an outer wall of Europe, was viewed as a bridge between East and West. This myth was used by those ideologists and politicians who supported the idea of South Slavic integration, for which it was necessary to overcome not only political barriers but also religious and, more broadly speaking, cultural differences. Since this mythologem was closely related to the creation and legitimizing of Yugoslavia, it never became as popular among the Croatian population as did the one of *antemurale Christianitatis*.

Žanić aside, nobody in Croatia was interested in the critical examination of this myth (as we have seen above, myths are, by definition, exempt from critical analysis). It is not necessary here to point out that many other European nations developed exactly the same myth of being the defenders of Christianity, but those Croats who made or occasionally still make use of the idea of the *antemurale* believe that it is exactly this position, as an outer wall of the Western world, that makes them unique and special in European history. Although it makes little sense to criticize myths, anyone who is not a believer cannot fail to notice that the idea of the *antemurale* ("outer wall") suggests that those defending what is behind their backs are actually excluded from the community they are defending. They may be manning the outer wall, but the real wall separates them from those living in the security provided by the bravely defended fortifications. Those outside sacrifice their lives in a somewhat masochistic way, without getting recognition from the defended. It is interesting that as early as the sixteenth century, the Croatian nobility was more or less aware of this fact, which in the coming centuries became increasingly clear. Nevertheless, the elites still insisted on the myth, because they had no other means to convince themselves of their importance for the Western world. It is even more interesting that even recently, there were some who believed that positing Croats as a nation destined to suffer for the benefit of others was a positive ideological construct, which supported Croatia's efforts to integrate into the European Union. On the other hand—and this is something that requires further research—the myth is also popular among conservative circles that have opposed Croa-

tia's entry into the EU. Perhaps the myth is a means of saying: "We are part of the West, but we have never been treated accordingly, and things should remain that way. Our permanent sacrifice made possible our survival through all these centuries, and it is the tragedy of our history that is the guarantee of our existence." This tragic aspect of history is, again, not specific to Croats but may be found throughout Europe.

The myth of *antemurale Christianitatis* is of course closely related to, or is part of, the use of Catholicism as one of the main arguments for supporting Croatia's belonging to the Western community.⁹ This ideological construct had its origin in much earlier periods, and we can trace it to the beginning of the seventeenth century: in 1604, the Croatian Diet passed a law forbidding members of all other religions except Catholicism to settle in the territory of the Kingdom (Budak 2007, 179). The Orthodox were a tolerated exception, because they were needed to supply manpower for the military border. This Catholic exclusiveness developed into a myth about Croats being one of the oldest Catholic nations in Europe, accepting baptism immediately after their settlement in the seventh century, when they made a treaty with the pope according to which they would never attack other nations and God would protect them in return (Klaić 1971, 195).

Although this construct is partly supported by evidence from early medieval sources, it is still a myth, the final embodiment of which has been produced by early-twentieth-century scholarship (Sakač 1931). It grew in importance during the communist period, when the Catholic Church was the only organized opposition to the regime. Open-air Mass celebrations were held in 1976 and 1979, commemorating thirteen centuries of Christianity in Croatia, 1,100 years of the "recognition" of Croatia by the Pope, and the millennium of Queen Helen (Jelena), who erected the burial chapel of Croatian kings in Solin, near Split (Oblak 1980; Peričić and Škvorčević 1986).¹⁰ It is a paradox that such a globalizing institution as the Catholic

⁹ It should be noted, of course, that the *antemurale* myth is not exclusive to Croats; it was used by most of the nations of Eastern and Southeastern Europe. See Subtelny (1986).

¹⁰ On the celebration of the "recognition" of Croatia in the time of *dux* Branimir, see also www.zadarskanadbiskupija.hr (accessed June 17, 2012). On the celebration of the millennium of Queen Helen, held in 1976, see www.nadbiskupija-split.com/katehetski/vijjesti/.../izlaganje.doc (accessed June 17, 2012).

Church became the backbone of Croatian nationalism. However, the Church was not the only source of nationalism or the only institution that perpetuated the tradition of nineteenth-century national ideology.

The nineteenth century deserves special attention in the present article. It witnessed an intensive production of myths, but this time their creators were professional or quasi-professional historians. As in many other countries, this was the century of national integration (or of the creation of the modern nation), and historiography was a diligent servant of national ideology. In Croatia this was even more so, because after the Napoleonic Wars and until 1918, Croats found themselves divided between the two parts of the Habsburg monarchy, the Hungarian and the Austrian. This was in itself an insurmountable obstacle to national integration, but furthermore, in both Austria and Hungary, Croats represented a marginal political element, not nearly as important as the Austrians or Hungarians. Therefore it seemed that their only weapon in fighting for more autonomy or even integration was "historical right."¹¹ This historical right, Croats claimed, allowed them to have a united kingdom of Croatia, Dalmatia, and Slavonia (which was indeed the official title of the Hungarian part of the Croatian lands), complete with the right to elect the ruler and to manage relations with the Kingdom of Hungary and the Habsburgs, who were both Hungarian and Croatian kings. In order to support these claims in a politically more or less hopeless situation, historians had to create the image of a large and independent early medieval Croatian kingdom, whose rulers successfully fought against mighty neighbors like the Byzantines, the Bulgarians, the Hungarians, and Venice. The establishment of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts (1867) and of the University of Zagreb (1874, based on a Jesuit academy established in 1669), both in Zagreb, provided the basis for the development of professional historiography, whose protagonists started producing literature not only for their colleagues but also for a broader audience.¹²

¹¹ One of the most influential political parties in the second half of the nineteenth century was the Party of Rights, whose program was based on the historical rights of Croatia. Its leader, Ante Starčević, himself became a mythical figure in the twentieth century. On the party, its history, and program, see Gross (2000).

¹² Mirjana Gross invented the term "scientification" to explain the changes happening in Croatian historiography in the second half of the nineteenth century. See Gross (1996, 172–188).

Apart from the myth of a strong early state during the Middle Ages, other myths were created, using elements from later periods. The myth of the bulwark of Christianity has already been mentioned. Another theme that became extremely popular was the conspiracy of the Zrinski and the Frankopans against Leopold I in 1670–1671 (Budak 2007, 158–162). Members of the two Croatian magnate families were unhappy with the way the Viennese court treated them, and equally with how it dealt with the Ottoman question. Several Hungarian magnates held the same opinion. This resulted in a conspiracy to overthrow the Habsburgs, but the plan failed. Finally, Petar Zrinski and Fran Krsto Frankopan even offered Croatia to their archenemy, the Turks, on the condition that Peter would become king of an autonomous kingdom of Croatia within the Ottoman Empire. The sultan, for political reasons, betrayed the plan to Leopold, who had the two lords arrested and executed in 1671. Their sizable holdings were confiscated, thus weakening even further the “remnants of the remnants” of Croatia. The Zrinski-Frankopan conspiracy, as interpreted by nineteenth-century historians, became an example of how bravely Croatian lords stood for the independence of Croatia and how badly the deceitful imperial court of Vienna handled the Croats. At least two facts were “forgotten” in order to make this a useful and functional myth. First, the Hungarians were left out, although they were the stronger party within the conspiracy. Second, the descriptions somehow avoided the unpleasant episode of Peter offering Croatia to the sultan in order to become king himself. The whole myth became extremely popular after Eugen Kumičić, a novelist and politician who championed the cause of Croatian rights, wrote a novel about the conspiracy (Kumičić 1893). Paintings were produced showing scenes related to the conspiracy and the fate of those who participated in it. This myth was used as a rallying cry against the Habsburgs, but something else was needed to oppose the Hungarians.

Two mighty myths were created for this purpose. The first is relatively recent, related to the 1848–1849 Revolution and the war that the Croats, siding with the Habsburgs, fought against the Hungarian revolutionaries. The Croatian army was led by *Ban* (Viceroy) Josip Jelačić, who fought with relative success against both Hungarians in Hungary and Austrian revolutionaries in Vienna. Although he died as an unpopular servant of the Viennese court, only a few years after his death he was “resurrected” as a symbol of resistance to constant Hungarian pressure, the goal of which was to diminish or even extinguish Croatian autonomy. Money was

collected to erect a monument to Jelačić in the main square of Zagreb, the first of its kind in Croatia, and images of Jelačić were widely distributed. Within a short time he became the most prominent hero of Croatian history (Smetko 2009).

Interestingly, Friedrich Engels criticized Jelačić's counter-revolutionary activity. This gave the communist authorities a reason to remove the ban's monument from the square and later to change the square's name from Ban Jelačić Square to the Square of the Republic. In 1990, the monument was put back in almost its original position, as a first act of restoration, although the communists were still the ruling party. After lengthy discussions, it was decided to turn Jelačić in the opposite direction, facing south rather than pointing his sword towards the north, in the direction of Hungary, as he originally did. Hungary was at that time considered an ally of Croatia, and Jelačić's mythological power was intended to be harnessed against new enemies, the Serbs. However, he was not entirely suitable for that purpose, since the original Jelačić fought side by side with the Serbs against the common foe.

The other myth that was created against the Hungarians, but also as a tool for the general mobilization of Croats, was the myth about King Tomislav, allegedly the first crowned king of Croatia.¹³ Until 1871 it was widely believed, based on Thomas of Split's writings, that the first Croatian ruler to receive a crown (from the Byzantine court) was Stephen I, sometime in the second half of the tenth century. But in order to make the Croatian kingdom seem much older than the Hungarian one, two prominent historians, Ivan Kukuljević and Franjo Rački, created the myth about the coronation of Tomislav in 925 (*Zbornik kralja Tomislava* 1925, 1–18, 40–85).

Tomislav's coronation came as a result of his successful wars against the Bulgarians and Hungarians, while his achievements included acting as the governor of the Dalmatian towns. This is not the place to discuss the methods used by these two historians or to engage in a detailed analysis of the sources. Suffice it to say that the interpretation offered by Rački, who was a serious scholar, can be subjected to criticism and scholarly debate,

¹³ The literature on Tomislav is immense. A survey of literature from the "formative period" of the myth can be found in *Zbornik kralja Tomislava* (1925). A recent display of the functionality of the myth, with a review of secondary literature, is in Bratulić (1998).

while Kukuljević's writings on this matter are an excellent example of deliberate myth-making. The whole project of turning Tomislav into the founding ruler of "real" Croatian statehood lasted for decades. Popular literature and historical paintings on this theme were created in the run-up to the celebration of the kingdom's first millennium (1925). By that time, Hungarians had ceased to present a threat, and the myth had to be used for different purposes. While for the Croats the myth was an expression of resistance to Serbian dominance in the newly formed Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, for the Serbian royal dynasty and its supporters, it represented a symbol of Serbian-Croatian unity (this was based on Tomislav's support for the Serbs in their fight against the Bulgarians). Commemorative plaques were put on parish churches wherever Croats lived, including in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia, and a monument was planned to be erected in Zagreb. This, for various reasons, happened only after World War II.

Besides the Austrians and the Hungarians, the Croats had a third enemy during the nineteenth century: the Italians. The Italian minority in Dalmatia, often supported by the Austrian administration, opposed the idea of uniting Dalmatia with Croatia and Slavonia. Taking advantage of census suffrage, the rich Italian citizens were dominant in city councils, often adhering to the policy of the Italian irredentists, who saw Dalmatia as part of Italy. There were also those, called autonomists, who identified as Slavs but opposed the idea of a union with Croatia. The clash with Dalmatian Italians and autonomists created the need for a myth that would support the Croatian attitude towards Dalmatian towns. In this case, an ecclesiastical person was chosen to be the hero. He was Gregory, an obscure bishop from the tenth century, whose name was recorded in the text describing the ecclesiastical councils in Split in 925 and 928, which means that he was a contemporary of King Tomislav.¹⁴ Although the surviving sources did not support this in any way, nineteenth-century Croatian historiographers ascribed to him the role of champion of the Slavonic liturgy and enemy of the Latin one, which in their eyes meant that he was a medieval Croatian nationalist, opposing the Italian clergy of the Dalmatian towns. Gregory's later fate is also revealing of the use of myths in everyday politics. Supporters of the Yugoslav idea saw him as a symbol of Yugoslavism, because he supported the common Slavonic liturgy. Mainstream Croatian nationalists placed his

¹⁴ A complete survey of the development of the myth appears in Budak (1994, 159–198).

monument, created by sculptor Ivan Meštrović, in three towns (Nin, Split, and Varaždin) and celebrated him as a protector of Croatian national interests in Dalmatia. For the extreme Croatian nationalists, however, he was *persona non grata*, because he introduced, they thought, the Byzantine, that is, Eastern Orthodox, Slavonic liturgy, trying to detach Croatia from the Catholic West to which it naturally belonged. Croatian Catholic dissidents saw Gregory as the paradigm of opposition to the Pope, and the Old-Catholic Croatian Church proclaimed him a saint. For the Italian fascists, he was a symbol of Slav barbarism, and they pulled down his monument in Split as soon as the Italian army occupied the city in 1941. After Italy's capitulation in 1943, Croatian fascists, the Ustaša, accused their former allies of vandalism for destroying the monument, which to the Ustaša was a national symbol of Croatian rights to Dalmatia. However, it was the communists who, after 1945, re-erected the monument of this bishop, who was used once again as a symbol of Yugoslavism. Today, needless to say, he is again a Croatian national symbol. Bishop Gregory and King Tomislav appear as twin myths, as historical contemporaries but also as symbols used by the same political groups for the same purposes.

It was not only simple nationalism that had the need to legitimize myths. There were also myths with a more pronounced social character, although they too included nationalist elements. Two outstanding myths of this kind were the myth about the peasant revolt of 1573 in northern Croatia and the one about the mutiny of the commoners against the patricians on the island of Hvar in 1510–1514. The myth about the peasant revolt and its leader, Matija Gubec, was produced by a nineteenth-century novelist, August Šenoa, obviously to show the poor Croatian peasants as morally superior to the nobles, who were not even Croatian (Šenoa 1877). The foundation of the Croatian (Republican) Peasant Party gave a new impetus to the myth, and the communists used it to attract peasants into partisan units, one of which was called Matija Gubec. During the communist regime, a huge monument was erected at the site of the final battle between the insurgents and the army of the nobility, while a spectacular movie reconstructed the whole event. Needless to say, the newly created memory of the revolt blew out of all proportion what actually happened during those few winter days of 1573 (Adamček 1968; Budak 2007, 148–149).

The myth of the Hvar revolt was used and stimulated by the communist regime for similar purposes, but it remained more locally focused

than the previous example. Its momentum was significantly diminished during a conference, when Nada Klaić, a historian known for criticizing myths, questioned the most important elements of the myth (Klaić 1977; Kasandrić 1978; Raukar 1997, 224–225; Vrandečić and Bertoša 2007, 36–37). Instead of recognizing Matija Ivanić, the leader of the uprising, as a fighter for social justice and freedom, she suggested that he was instead fighting for his own privileges. In a similar way, she also criticized Šenoa for producing the myth concerning Matija Gubec. Her frequent public appearances and her involvement in scholarly debates indeed affected public opinion, at least concerning some elements of Croatian mythology.

A significant role in supporting Croatian national exclusiveness (and not only Croatian, when we talk about Yugoslavia) was played by the educational system, especially in the use of history as a school subject. Many analyses of textbooks have been performed in recent years, and one of the conclusions is that there is a certain degree of continuity in presenting the same mythologems—those related to the continuity of state and nation—throughout the twentieth century.¹⁵ There is no difference in this respect between the communist period and the era after 1990. In all textbooks there appear maps suggesting the existence of a state whose territory changes but whose character stays the same. In trying to achieve a certain balance among all the republics of Yugoslavia, the authorities introduced the idea of a greater national state for each of the republics. Slovenia thus had its golden period in the time of the duchy of Carantania in the eighth century; Croatia in the time of its national kings in the tenth and eleventh centuries; Bosnia in the fourteenth century, under King Tvrtko I; Montenegro in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, in the form of the kingdom of Dioclia; Serbia under Tsar Dušan in the fourteenth century, and Macedonia under Tsar Samuilo around the year 1000. All these myths, included in textbooks and created—with the exception of the Croatian and Serbian ones—by nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians, served to show that every Yugoslav nation was once upon a time great, occupying the territory of others, thus suggesting a certain equality among them.

¹⁵ One example: Karge (2003, 489–493). An excellent analysis of Croatian history textbooks and the educational system after 1918 is provided by Petrungraro (2006).

History as it is taught in schools is, of course, only a reflection of history as a scholarly discipline. An intensified production of Croatian histories since 1990 supports such a conclusion. These were mostly brief overviews of political history; they had to serve several purposes.¹⁶ One of them was purging Croatian history of (alleged) Yugoslav and communist misinterpretations, another reaffirming the continuity of Croatian history from at least the seventh century onwards, and finally supporting the idea of Croats as belonging to the Western world. In this way, Croatian historians supported both myths: the exclusiveness of a thousand-year-old nation-state and Croatia's justified pursuit of membership in the European Union.

The insistence on the continuity of nation and state in modern Croatia is best expressed in the preamble of the Croatian constitution. It states:

The millennial national identity of the Croatian nation and the continuity of its statehood, confirmed by the course of its entire historical experience in various political forms and by the perpetuation and development of the state-building idea grounded in the historical right of the Croatian nation to full sovereignty, has manifested itself:

in the formation of the Croatian principalities in the seventh century;

in the independent medieval state of Croatia established in the ninth century;

in the Kingdom of the Croats established in the tenth century;

in the preservation of the attributes of statehood under the Croatian-Hungarian personal union;

in the independent and sovereign decision of the Croatian Parliament in 1527 to elect a king from the Habsburg Dynasty;

¹⁶ Among others: Čović, Nikić, and Šentija (1991); Macan and Šentija (1992); Pavličević (1998).

in the independent and sovereign decision of the Croatian Parliament to ratify the Pragmatic Sanction in 1712;

in the conclusions of the Croatian Parliament of 1848 regarding the restoration of the integrity of the Triune Kingdom of Croatia under the authority of the ban (viceroy), rooted in the historical, national and natural right of the Croatian nation;

in the Croatian-Hungarian Compromise of 1868 regulating relations between the Kingdom of Dalmatia, Croatia and Slavonia and the Kingdom of Hungary, resting on the legal traditions of both states and the Pragmatic Sanction of 1712.¹⁷

The preamble of the constitution thus contains references to several of the myths mentioned so far, as well as some that will not be further elaborated in this text. In this way, myths became a legislated truth, a kind of warranty for Croatian independence, because nobody would dare to challenge the constitution as the expression of the will of the Croatian nation.¹⁸

Given that Croats had no power and no opportunity to create a state of their own in the nineteenth and the early twentieth century, this insistence on the historical roots of statehood and national continuity is understandable. On the other hand, the power of the nineteenth-century myth of continuous statehood was strong enough even without the war of 1991–1995, which gave it a fresh stimulus. Accustomed to being in an inferior position, Croatian politicians viewed myths of statehood and the like as an important weapon in opposing foreign centers of power. The notion of historical right has thus remained part of the ideological system to this day, although at present it is confined within the private sphere or promoted openly only by radical nationalists.

Apart from history and religion, the third tool for supporting Croatia's belonging to the West was art history. Since its beginnings in the late nineteenth century, it was used primarily to support Croatian national individualism. For this purpose, the term "Old Croatian art/culture" (*Starohrvatska kultura*) was created, in an attempt to describe features

¹⁷ The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia ("consolidated text"): www.sabor.hr (accessed June 17, 2012).

¹⁸ The preamble was discussed by Petrunžaro (2006, 25–30).

of early medieval material culture in Croatia as something specific and unique. This, of course, is mainly not true, because Croatian culture was just part of a broader cultural area of Pre-Romanesque and Romanesque art. Nevertheless, a set of symbols, based on the Pre-Romanesque pattern of interlacing ribbons, came to be seen as a Croatian logo (alongside the checkered red-and-white coat of arms, made famous worldwide by the successes of the national football team) (Budak 2009). Today, the unique character of Croatian material culture is emphasized far less than its belonging to the overall Western culture.

Art history proved instrumental in supporting another myth, the one that held that Croatia belonged to the Western world (read “the European Union”) from its inception. This myth became important in Croatian politics after the country gained its independence and was seeking international—above all EU—support. A number of large exhibitions were organized, in order to stress the connections of Croatia with, for example, the Carolingian realm, the Angevin commonwealth, and the world of the Renaissance (Milošević 2000; Budak and Jurković 2001; Erlande-Brandenburg and Jurković 2004). The first of these large exhibitions, held in the Vatican and presenting a thousand years of Croatian culture, combined two myths: one about Croatia belonging to Europe, and the other about it being at all times Catholic (*Hrvati* 1999).

At the same time, in the rhetoric of Croatian politicians, one often hears the claim that Croatia is finally coming back to where it has always belonged. This implies that at some point it was not part of Europe, and we can safely guess that it is the Yugoslav period they have in mind, because they equate Yugoslavia with the Balkans, and—according to conventional stereotypes—the Balkans are not part of Europe. Since, however, Croatian authorities want to lead the way in helping other states in the region to become members of the EU, it is unclear (as it always is when myths are used as political arguments) whether they want to make these countries European, or whether they also want to bring them back to where they had once belonged.

This brings us to some final considerations about the future use of myths in Croatian politics. It should be stressed that only some of the most important myths were discussed in the preceding pages, but all of them fit into one or two of the aforementioned categories, so I felt no need to present them all separately. In a sort of epilogue to this article,

I shall mention Žanić's reference to the assertion of Joschka Fischer, at the time Germany's foreign minister, that in the future Croatia would function as a bridge towards the southeast, just as it had for centuries under the Habsburgs (Žanić 2003, 195).

Part of the Croatian political elite, I suppose, will embrace this anachronistic comparison as a definition of Croatian foreign policy. This shows that it is almost impossible to destroy myths, because they are so flexible, and there are always new impulses to give them new life. And yet, what other choice does a professional historian have but to go out into the field and try to kill the dragon?

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Izabela Skórzyńska and Anna Wachowiak

Deconstructing the Myth of the “Wicked German” in Northern and Western Parts of Poland: Local Approaches to Cultural Heritage

Introduction

Our study seeks to describe and analyze the changes that occurred in the “symbolic repertoire” defining Polish attitudes to German heritage in Poland after 1989. It addresses the question of the Polish myth of the “wicked German” that haunted and still haunts the local communities of western and northern Polish territories (which under communism were called the “Regained Lands” or/and “Western Borderlands”), where Polish and German inhabitants coexisted before World War II.¹

Statistics from 1931 (the second census in the Second Polish Republic) show that of the 31,916,000 people inhabiting the territory of Poland, there were 4,442,000 Ukrainians, 2,733,000 Jews, 990,000 Belarusians, and 741,000 Germans, and more than one million belonged to other ethnic groups. In cities like Wrocław (German: Breslau) and Szczecin (German: Stettin), which were German at the time, or like Gdańsk (German: Danzig), which was a free and multicultural city, Poles constituted the minority. After World War II, the proportion reversed com-

¹ Comprehensive studies on the history, memory, and identity of the “Regained Lands”/“Western Borderlands” were realized in Poland after World War II by, among others, the War Western Institute (Poznan and Warsaw), the Pracownia Artistic-Research Community of Olsztyn, the Borussia Cultural Community Association of Olsztyn, and the Sejny Borderland Foundation.

pletely. Germans were expelled, while Poles from eastern regions were relocated to the new western lands. After 1956, when broad compulsory or voluntary migrations had stopped, Poland's population became more homogeneous. According to the census of 2002, 2,868,500 people belonging to ethnic minorities lived in Polish territory, including 1,529,000 Germans, while the total population amounted to about 39 million (Stręk 2003). Although today the German minority represents a small percentage of Poland's citizens, the number of "symbolic domains" devoted to the memory of previous German dwellers is increasing in Poland's historical and cultural landscape.

The Myth of the "Wicked German"

We scrutinize the myth of the German as the eternal enemy of Poles and Poland from two theoretical perspectives: cultural and historiographical. The cultural myth has its origins in the nineteenth century, and it is closely related to the 123 years (1795–1918) of Polish partition. Prussia was one of the three powers that gained Polish territories after the successive partitions of Poland. The myth of the German as the eternal enemy of Poles is the result of a constant process of mythologization of the Germans from three perspectives: 1) the gradual deformation and depreciation of the image of the "alien" (the German as "alien"); 2) the extension of this myth to cover the entire German population (a good illustration of this process is the proverb "The only good German is the one who lies buried in the earth"); 3) giving the myth a universal, timeless character, as in the phrase "Since the beginning of the world, the German has never been a brother to the Pole" (Bystroń 1924, cited by Stomma 2000, 165).

The mythologization of the German as the eternal enemy of Poles originates in the folk tradition. It was further developed by nineteenth-century Polish patriotic poetry and literature that encouraged Poles to resist and oppose German expansion, as in the poem "Rota," by Maria Konopnicka (1842–1919), which stated: "the German will neither spit in our face/Nor Germanize our children." This mythical repertoire was reinforced by Polish experiences during World Wars I and II.

A historical myth is defined by Jerzy Topolski as "convictions that are not verified and impossible to verify, that remain in the social consciousness for long time. A myth derives its power from two sources. The first is

a certain interpretation of the world, deeply rooted in a given society [...], and the second is a constant process, related to scientific development, the tendency to undermine defined assertions, which leads to their stagnation, and thus to their mythologizing" (Topolski 1996, 203). Myths, just like history and memory, always have a cultural character (of social, symbolic, and/or factual nature) (Topolski 1996). The myth itself, its content, changes over time, which means that it can be reinterpreted in relation to social practices of dealing with the past such as writing history, building monuments, and celebrating holidays (Topolski 1996, 203).

At the end of World War II, Polish historiography showed a growing interest in the historical destiny of what was called the "Regained Lands" with particular emphasis on 1) the Piast era;² 2) the creation of the Polish western borders; 3) the history of Polish-German conflicts; and 4) Polish settlements after World War II. Popular culture contributed to the mythologization of the Piast era through music compositions, dramas, and popular plays dealing with the historical genesis of settlements in these regions and depicting the German as a fascist aggressor. The historiographical approach and popular culture's own narratives were combined with rituals and other ceremonies, as well as with constructing monuments that constantly depicted Germans as the eternal enemies of the Poles and of Poland. These anti-German attitudes and practices were echoed by the widespread destruction of German material heritage on Polish territory, in a kind of "urbicide" or "warchitecture."³

² The Piast dynasty, the first historical Polish dynasty, ruled the country from around 960 to 1370. The Piast myth was developed in the 1890s to support the Polish national ideology. It was constructed around the idea of Westernization, of the attachment to Europe and its liberal ideas based on the historical fact of Piast rule in western Poland. The myth identified the western Polish territories during the Middle Ages as a strong, Westernized state, comparable to other Western European countries.

³ The term "urbicide" was first coined by Michael Moorcock in 1963 to criticize the renovation of American cities. It was rediscovered and employed with a different meaning by Bosniak architects during the Yugoslav war to refer to the destruction of the Mostar Bridge and Mostar infrastructure. In the new context, the term defines any violence against the city during (civil) wars. The term "warchitecture" emerged in Sarajevo in the early 1990s describing the war waged on architecture, understood not only as the material environment of the city but also as an extension of people's identities.

The signing of the “Treaty of Good Neighborship and Friendly Cooperation between Poland and Germany,” on July 17, 1991, should have stopped these practices. This treaty applied the best practices of French-German relationships, including the principles of inter-governmental consultations; of partnerships between cities and communal councils; and of cross-border cooperation in the fields of economy, science, and culture, as well as youth exchange and cooperation in elaborating Polish-German handbooks. One visible result of this treaty was the creation of the Foundation of Polish-German Cooperation, which regulated the status of Polish and German minorities, both in Germany and Poland. This treaty asserted that respect for the neighbors’ culture was mandatory and encouraged the learning of both the native and the neighbors’ languages (Krzemiński 2011, 2). The treaty sought to pave the way for Poland to join the European Union in 2004 (Krzemiński 2011, 2).

The Polish-German reconciliation was cherished by many people. The German historian Heinrich August Winkler noted: “In 1989, for the first time in 300 years, German matters (i.e., national reunification) and Polish matters (regaining sovereignty) were not in conflict with each other but were mutually supportive” (Krzemiński 2011, 1–2). However, many others still interpreted the Polish-German past as antagonistic, invested with the power to shape the present and leave the future uncertain.

One of the constant supporters of such views was the Polish National-Catholic Church.⁴ As Anna Wolff-Powęska stated: “The National-Catholic Church supported the continuation of the old communist rhetoric towards West Germany. They strongly claim that the German hegemonic pursuits, the German-Russian business interests, will harm Poland and that the German neighbors are taking advantage of European integration exclusively to reinforce their own business interests in Central and Eastern Europe. Although it is a discourse meant to gain and mobilize voters, it publicized old clichés and myths, using history as an unlimited repertoire for arguments...” (Krzemiński 2011, 4).

⁴ The Polish National Catholic Church was founded in the United States by Catholic immigrants from Poland. The institution is an independent Catholic church that recognizes its bonds with the Holy See. Its branch in Poland is not affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church. The communists used the National Catholic Church as a counterbalance to the influence of the Catholic Church in Poland.

Despite the efforts undertaken for Polish-German reconciliation, this quotation shows that the Polish public debate on Polish-German relationships is still dominated by a pathetic and heroic version of history propagated by some Polish historians and some populist politicians.

***"Symbolic domain"⁵: Poles and the German memorials in the
"Regained Western and Northern Lands"***

As Anna Wolff-Powęska has written, "Nowadays, Poles and Germans, wounded, overwhelmed by memories, desperately need projects heading towards the future. As the German historian Carl Dedecius said, history does not exist in order to supply us with nervous shivers. [...] De-historization as a political and social task turned out to be a courageous and farsighted plan. However, it does not mean, as it is attributed to political elites of the 1990s, the resignation from the past and historical memory. [...] It would have been fine if the image of the German neighbor were the result of credible assessment based on knowledge and rational calculation, and not on the myths and prejudices dating back 200 years ago" (Krzemiński 2011, 6).

These two tendencies mentioned above tend to hide a third one, namely the regional and local practices of privately commemorating the memory of Germans. Crucial changes in Poles' attitudes towards the Germans can be detected on those two levels. These changes, which are proceeding slowly, have already contributed to the deconstruction of the myth of the "wicked German."

Two decades after the signing in Bonn of the "Treaty of Good Neighborhood and Friendly Cooperation between Poland and Germany," on

⁵ By the notion of "symbolic domain," we mean, following Lech M. Nijakowski, "(...) a territory that a given group (whether ethnic, national, regional, cultural, etc.) dominates symbolically. This territory need not be continuous, perhaps even consisting of many "islets" falling within the symbolic domain of a different group. The boundaries of a symbolic domain need not correspond to the boundaries of the political domain; in some cases the symbolic domain or at least some part of it may be far from a given group's nation state. [...] Symbolic dominion over a given territory requires the construction of material signs of the groups such as markers with names in the native language of a given group, monuments, and objects from the ethnic, religious cult of a given group (e.g., for Jews a synagogue)." (Nijakowski 2006–2007, 28).

July 17, 1991, it is useful to analyze and (re)interpret Polish-German “symbolic domains” and their impact on deconstructing the myth of the German, seen as the eternal enemy of Poles, a topic that is hotly debated in today’s Poland.

Barbara Szacka has noted that in domestic and private memory, besides the beliefs in the wicked German, one might also find memories of the decent German (Machcewicz 2010, 7–12). This idea faced strong opposition from conservative politicians. The local and regional proposals of commemorating the Germans stir more controversy on a nationwide and statewide scale than on local and regional ones. Local, communal, or domestic references to the Polish-German past illuminate “foreign policies on a small scale,” which are different from the official or national ones. Nevertheless, they are overshadowed by public debates in which standpoints concerning Polish-German relationships are expressed in the category of political correctness (the policy of reconciliation) or, conversely, in historical revisionism (based especially on the experience of World War II, which created hostility towards the Germans).

One essential element and indicator of contemporary Polish attitudes towards the Germans is the process of recovering the German past in the “Regained Lands.” These are the territories where, after World War II, anti-German feelings led to the total denial of the German presence. Pomorze Szczecińskie and Gdańskie (German: Western and Danzig Pommern), Warmia (German: Warmia) and Mazury (German: Masuren), Dolny Śląsk (German: Niederschlesien), Ziemia Lubuska (German: Lebuser Land), and Górny Śląsk (German: Oberschlesien) experienced an unprecedented process in which all traces left by the German predecessors were removed.

Our research, focused on selected Polish-German symbolic sites of the “Regained Lands,” documents the existence of positive attitudes towards the German presence in this region, as well as the revival of the old myths. On the one hand, we have detected numerous forms of open civic patriotism inspired by the art historian and politician Jan Józef Lipski (1981). At the beginning of the 1980s, he argued that Poles, in their pursuit of freedom and democracy, needed to rethink their history and memory in order to integrate the national, ethnic, and religious minorities that used to live in multicultural Poland. The country needed to cherish not only Polish but also German, Jewish, and Russian, as well as Tatar, heritage. He also advocated that Poles improve relations with their neighbors.

On the other hand, we have recorded the attitude of Edmund Glaza, the founder of the Committee of Defense against Germanization. One notable example, which we discovered by chance in 2011, was an anonymous letter placed on the pedestal of the monument dedicated to the poet Maria Konopnicka in Gdańsk. The letter appealed to Poles' sense of identity, urging that it be protected against reviving German memory. There are also civil servants, politicians, and even historians who opposed the recovery of the German memory in Nakomiady (German: Eichmedien) (Bismarck's boulder) or the restoration of Wrocław Folk Hall's former Prussian name, Centenary Hall (Prais and Wojciechowska 2005; Kurs and Prais 2005).

In the following pages, we provide a more detailed description of several examples of recovery of the Polish-German past and their function in deconstructing the myth of the German as an eternal enemy of Poles, as well as in re-evaluating the Piast myth.

Bismarck's boulder in Nakomiady, Centenary Hall in Wrocław, and the signboard of victims of World War I in Olsztynek

Two local events gained nationwide fame and turned out to be significant moments in the short history of Polish-German reconciliation after the 1991 treaty. The first was the decision of the Masurian village of Nakomiady to present Bismarck's boulder to the public. The boulder was discovered during road works and identified by two German tourists. Conservative politicians and academics criticized the decision to restore the stone monument to the local cultural panorama. They argued that the boulder reinforced the Prussian myth of Bismarck (referring to visible evidence of his cult: monuments and towers erected all over the part of Poland claimed by Prussia after the partition at the turn of the nineteenth century).

The Nakomiady boulder dates back to 1899 and was commissioned by local German citizens. The boulder was still there in the 1960s, long after World War II (Borodziej and Żaryn 2007). Its restoration was made possible through the efforts of the Kętrzyn (German: Rastenburg) borough administrator, councilor Halina Szara. With the approval of the village's inhabitants, the boulder was placed near the Nakomiady church, where it had originally stood. This location is historically justified but contradicts the Polish national mythology based on Christian-Catholic

tradition, as the boulder reflects the fact that the region was once subjected to an intensive policy of colonization initiated by Bismarck (known as the *Kulturkampf*) (Borodziej and Żaryn 2007).

The decision to restore the signboard on Warmian Olsztynek (German: Warmian Hohenstein) Castle, which displays the names of 68 students of the local teachers' college who died in World War I, reveals a third type of recovery of the Polish-German memory. The problem was not whether it should be displayed in public but where: in a museum or at its original location.

Cemetery of World War II victims in Wesola⁶

The woodland graveyard in Silesian Wesola commemorates the victims of the labor camp established in 1943 by the Nazis, where prisoners were buried, as were ashes of soldiers of the Wehrmacht. Journalists from the *Gazeta Wyborcza* wrote: "People in Mysłowice were determined in their efforts not to forget either the Jews from the labor camp, who died of hunger and exhaustion, or the Ukrainian and Russian women who died of hard labor, or the German soldiers" (Klich and Krzyk 2010). The graveyard is a small necropolis with modest concrete paths. The burial fields are marked by a few small piles of earth, dug by local residents who were uncertain precisely where the corpses had been buried: "In the middle of the quadrangle, there are graves several times larger than those separated with stone slabs marked with the abbreviation I.S.A.W." (Klich and Krzyk 2010).

Disputes around the graveyard erupted on two occasions. The first time was right after the war: "During the day some workers sent by communist officials planted trees. At night, people uprooted them and lit candles. In the morning, the candles went into the rubbish, and once again workers planted trees. It went on for months, until authorities learned they could not win against human stubbornness" (Klich and Krzyk 2010). The second time, the dispute began in 2010, when the Memory Foundation gained a German grant and decided to transfer the ashes of the German soldiers to a military cemetery. The local community won the dispute, and the cemetery stayed intact. The local community

⁶ Wesola is a quarter in Mysłowice (German: Myslowitz).

saved the Wesola graveyard each time, while other traces of German presence in the Regained Lands, including numerous German and Protestant cemeteries, were destroyed.

Cemetery of nonexistent cemeteries: Szczecin, Szamocin, Gdańsk

In the 1950s and 1960s, all over Poland, many Jewish and German necropolises were systematically destroyed. This was the fate of the Central Cemetery in Szczecin, where in the German graves, new bodies were buried (sometimes the old bodies were exhumed first—but not always). This was also the case in major cities like Gdańsk and Wrocław, as well as in the little town of Szamocin, where the ground still holds the remains of many Germans.

At Szczecin Central Cemetery, a fight was waged against prejudice. The tombstones were restored not only because they were reminders of the German past but also because they were works of art of great historic and aesthetic value. In Gdańsk's parks, from Wrzeszcz to central Gdańsk, there are stones inscribed with information about the cemeteries that existed in past decades. In Gdańsk and Wrocław, there are also necropolises commemorating "The Dead Buried in Nonexistent Graveyards."

In Szamocin (German: Samotschin), Luba Zarembińska, a theatrical animator, used the description of Szamocin's graveyards left by Ernst Hugo Toller, a German-Jewish drama writer and poet, and staged an amateur theater performance entitled *Long Street of the Living and the Dead*, which commemorated past inhabitants. Such performances made Szamocin famous as one of the most interesting theatrical centers animating the local past in the multicultural border towns (Skórzyńska 2010, 41–77). In 2009, stone inscriptions commemorating Evangelical and Jewish cemeteries were also dedicated by the local community.

Marek Beylin, while discussing Karolina Wigura's book *Culpability of Nations: Forgiveness as a Policy Strategy*, stated that one of Europe's greatest achievements consisted of reframing the dramatic events of World War II, particularly in rejecting "revenge" and "retaliation" against the Germans (Beylin 2011). At the local level, "small-scale Polish-German foreign relations" reject revenge. This emphasizes the efforts made to recover the German past, inspired by simple human emotions or by a

sense of mutual respect and civic responsibility. On the one hand, there is respect for the dead, and on the other, respect for the historic value of places, buildings, and symbols, even those built by the Germans who once lived there.

Local reception of the Grabiszyn II symbolic domain in Wrocław: A research in progress

A complicated process of demystification of the German as the eternal enemy of the Poles and of the Piast myth took place in Wrocław. It started with the project of building a commemorative monument for nonexistent cemeteries, Grabiszyn II (Burak and Okólska 2007; Bachmann 2009; Maciejewska 2009a; Bramorski 2009).⁷

In the past, Wrocław had undeniable ties with the Habsburgs (a fact that does not provoke controversy today). After 1741, when Frederick II's army entered the city, it became a Prussian fortress. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Wrocław became an open city, thus gaining more space for development.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the spatial and architectural politics of Frederick Wilhelm IV (the "romantic on the throne") enriched the town with historical buildings in contemporary styles. It was at that time that the neo-Renaissance House of Silesian States, Generalna Komendatura Miasta, the neo-Gothic building of the Court of Justice, and a new wing of the Royal Palace were built (Kulak 2001).

In the second half of the nineteenth century, due to the growth of its population, Wrocław extended to a new area, where new buildings were erected: the stock exchange, the post office, the fire station, the slaughterhouse, and the port in Popowice. At the same time, two new bridges were constructed, as well as new railway connections between Wrocław and southern Wielkopolska (Great Poland). In 1913, to commemorate the centenary of the German victory in the Battle of the Nations, at Leipzig, the aforementioned Centennial Hall was built (Kulak 2001, 216–241).

Wrocław, as a German city inhabited by Germans, avoided the worst of World War II. Eventually, the war knocked on their doors too.

⁷ Grabiszyn is a quarter in Wrocław where a monument dedicated to the nonexistent German cemeteries was erected in 2008.

In August 1944, Wrocław declared itself a closed stronghold, "*Festung Breslau*," and prepared to wage war against the Red Army. The unstoppable Soviet offensive convinced the Germans to give up fighting and to abandon the city en masse (Kulak 2001, 339).

In 1945 and the years immediately afterward, an almost complete exchange of population took place in Wrocław. After World War II, the few Germans and Jews who stayed found themselves surrounded by many newcomers from Central Poland: Wielkopolska, Zabuzan,⁸ and Lwów (German: Lemberg; Ukrainian: Lviv). The settlement of the Polish population was accompanied by intensive de-Germanization policies. As a result, a complete rejection of German heritage ensued.

A visible and egregious form of this policy was (as Zbigniew Mazur has pointed out) the complete replacement of German monuments by Polish ones (Mazur 1997, 305). The fate of monuments and street names was shared by the cemeteries, which were systematically destroyed through the end of the 1960s. In 1945, the Polish administration in Wrocław took over seventy cemeteries. Of these, forty-four were closed down or abandoned after 1950. Between 1964 and 1965, other cemeteries were closed, while some were singled out for renovation because a few Polish tombs were discovered there (Burak and Okólska 2007, 225–226).

In April 2011, the authors of this study conducted research on the reception of the symbolic domain "Grabiszyn II Monument of the Former Residents of the City Buried in Nonexistent Cemeteries." In our research, we applied purposive sampling (our respondents were 206 students from sociology and history departments). We focused on three main issues concerning the process of demystification of the German as the eternal enemy of Poles and Poland in the local memory.

The first issue was the perception of the Grabiszyn II symbolic domain through the prism of ethnic/national conflict, seen as a historical experience of the twentieth-century Polish-German conflict, transferred to a symbolic level (as the conflict concerning German "symbols and monuments" in the Polish local landscape). The second issue referred to the approach of Wrocław's citizens to the Grabiszyn II symbolic domain

⁸ Zabuzan is a region on the east side of the Bug River, now in Ukraine, inhabited by Poles before World War II.

in the context of cultural practices of the memory of the dead. The third was connected with historical knowledge related to the context of the raising of the Grabiszyn II monument and the importance of this knowledge in celebrating this space.

The result of our research sheds new light on the complicated process of dismantling the myth of the German as the eternal enemy of Poland. The first conclusion concerning the local perception of the Grabiszyn II symbolic domain, read through the lens of ethnic/national conflict as a historical experience, shows that a symbolic transfer operated in the last seventy years, with the place symbolically possessed by one group (namely the Poles) at the expense of the other (the Germans).

More than half of the interviewees (59 percent) noticed the existence of such a conflict. The same number of people considered Grabiszyn II to be a monument that challenges traditional nationalistic values. On the other hand, when asked whether the monument reflected the opposition “us/them” (aliens to the nation, strangers) or, alternately, the city’s complicated history, the interviewees overwhelmingly answered that it stood for the city’s complicated history (77 percent). Only 6 percent said that it highlighted the opposition “us/them” (strangers). Seventeen percent of those interviewed had no opinion on the issue.

One question that provided us with especially valuable answers was whether respondents supported the rewriting of history through the destruction of objects built by foreigners and their replacement by national objects. Eighty-one percent of people interviewed did not support such practices, and only 10 percent did, while 9 percent did not express any opinion.

A second conclusion concerns students’ perception of the social and cultural functions of the Grabiszyn II symbolic domain. The function most often identified by the students who participated in our survey was the cultural practice of worshipping the dead; 36 percent chose this. Thirty-four percent believed that such practices were simple marketing policies identifying Wrocław as a multicultural city. For 12 percent, such practices were the result of the historical policy of the state, while for 8 percent they were the result of applying rules of political correctness. Ten percent did not have any opinion on this matter.

The students’ answers indicated that the commemorative function and preservation of the memory of the dead referred more to cultural memory than to the national one, as this was a universal practice not

related to a specific nation. This hypothesis was supported by the distribution of answers to the question of whether Grabiszyn was set in opposition to traditional national monuments. Sixty-four percent answered that it was not, 24 percent had no opinion on this matter, and 12 percent assumed that it was.

The answers to the question of whether Grabiszyn II created new values reinforced the aforementioned conclusion, namely the identification of the Grabiszyn II symbolic domain with the duty of commemorating the dead. Only 25 percent of the interviewees agreed that it created new values, while 36 percent answered that it did not, and 39 percent had no opinion on this matter.

The analysis of the answers to the question concerning new values in the Polish-German context must take into account the young age of our interviewees, as well as the fact that their historical consciousness was influenced during the last twenty years by the policy of Polish-German conciliation. These young people have not experienced antagonistic relations between Germans and Poles to the same extent that their parents and grandparents did.

These assumptions find support in the results of sociological research carried out in 2009 on the memory of World War II. Its conclusions showed that the Polish memory of World War II has changed since 1989, and that the previously dominant myth of the "wicked German" from the era of the Polish People's Republic (1945–1989) has been seriously weakened over the last twenty years (Szacka 2010). This remark is useful in explaining the opinions of our respondents. We can conclude that the interviewees were more sensitive to the universal dimension of the Grabiszyn II symbolic domain of paying respect to the memory of the dead than to its national meanings.

Another conclusion we can draw from our research is connected with the importance of historical knowledge in the process of giving meaning to the Grabiszyn II symbolic domain. Our interviewees pointed out the connections of the monument's function with history and historic memory (32 percent and 29 percent, respectively). They also stressed the cognitive function of the monument and their conviction that such motivation ought to be known to the citizens of Wrocław (but only 18 percent knew; 47 percent knew to some degree, and 35 percent did not know at all). It is astonishing that more than 78.3 percent of the interviewees stated that knowledge about the historic context of this domain

was important; 17.2 percent did not have any opinion, and only 4.4 percent were convinced that historic justification was not important. This means that the young generation is convinced about the crucial role of history (historical memory) in shaping local and regional awareness. It also points out the possibility to change the image of the German as the eternal enemy of Poland and Poles.

Final remarks

Our study tried to show that, more than twenty years after the signing of the Polish-German treaty on mutual cooperation and friendship, deconstructing the myth of the German as an eternal enemy of Poles and Poland is an ongoing process. In our opinion, this process could be facilitated by regional, local, and domestic practices of recovering German heritage on Polish territory, especially in the former “Regained Lands.”

Bismarck’s boulder in Nakomiady, the graveyard in Wesoła, or the stones and the cemeteries of nonexistent cemeteries in Gdańsk and Wrocław prove that death not only settled accounts or sublimated the past but also teaches us how to live together, despite differences. All local memory practices related to these Polish-German symbolic domains have the potential to outlive the old national ones, by showing small communities’ capacity for treating German heritage as something that not only separates but also connects Germans and Poles.

Our ongoing research on Polish-German symbolic domains leads us to conclude that changes in attitude towards both the German and the Polish-German past are most likely to happen where harsh experiences of the past overlap with good ones, where people, learning meaningful lessons from the past, prefer the more universal approach of respect for the dead over revenge or retaliation. Monuments, signboards, and cemeteries in Szamocin, Gdańsk, Wrocław, Szczecin, Wesoła, Nakomiady, Olsztynek, and many other places all over Poland were founded by local authorities and supported by local communities, often taking an active part in these initiatives. They emerged in defiance of the state’s historic policy, balancing between the idealistic image of Polish-German reconciliation and the populist effort to once again stoke fear of the German. Despite all these initiatives, it does not mean that the old myth of the “wicked German” is no longer present or that our society is suddenly capable of collective forgiveness for past injustice.

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Ștefan Bosomitu

Mythologizing the Biographies of Romanian Underground Communists: The Case Study of Miron Constantinescu

On December 5, 1961, the plenary session of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party opened in Bucharest. First Secretary Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej¹ read out the report of the party's delegation to the Twenty-Second Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Building on one of the congress's central points, he proposed a series of measures aimed at re-evaluating critically the history of Romania's communists, thus prompting the party members to fight the cult of personality:

Factories, institutions, towns, streets, and foundations should no longer bear the names of living personalities. In the case of those named after deceased personalities, a re-examination should be conducted. Here too there have been abuses. Take Vasile Roaită—you would think he was Marx or someone big: statue after statue

¹ Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (1901–1965) was the communist leader of Romania from 1947–1965. He joined the Communist Party in 1930 and became secretary general (the party leader) in 1944. He consolidated his position after the 1952 purges when Ana Pauker (the former unofficial leader of the party), Vasile Luca, and Teohari Georgescu were marginalized. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, he introduced a policy more independent vis-à-vis Moscow.

after statue. What is this? Everywhere you turn you find Donca Simo, Elena Pavel, and then Donca Simo again. Well, what did she accomplish after all—she was just a girl who carried out her work and, come to think of it, she even slacked off... She made a contribution all right, but that is the duty of a communist. In conclusion, the current naming practices should be re-examined, and in the future all names shall be given with the party's express approval. (Cătănuș 2005, 178)

Vasile Roaită died in February 1933 during the railway workers' great strike at the Grivița factory in Bucharest. For a while, he was given pride of place among the communist heroes. Donca Simo died in Văcărești Prison in 1937, during the same "underground" period of the party's history, when the communist movement was illegal in Romania. The same goes for Elena Pavel, who died in prison in Ploiești during the American bombings of 1943.

The secretary general's instructions show the ease and cynicism with which the party continuously rewrote its history. Gheorghiu-Dej's speech boils down to one central idea: the party needed new heroes. Accordingly, the biographies of the three figures mentioned above were to be excised from the historical record—despite the piety with which their names were uttered in October 1945 at the party's first national conference after the end of the "underground" period (*Scântea*, October 19, 1945).

The Romanian Communist Party was a rather unimportant organization in interwar Romania; between 1924 and 1944 the communist movement was illegal, and the party functioned underground. Nevertheless, after 1945 communist propaganda succeeded in building its own pantheon of heroes—the "martyrs of the underground period" and the "sons of the people"—complete with heroic myths surrounding key events of the party's history, such as the strikes of 1918, 1920, 1927, and 1933, and the political trials of communist militants in 1922, 1934, and 1936. On the whole, one might find that the Romanian Communist Party had a difficult relationship with its history. Brushing aside historical facts and established interpretations alike, the party endlessly re-evaluated the official discourse on its history. Consequently, the communist heroes who entered the "Red pantheon" might subsequently find themselves evicted from this holy place, according to the changes in the party's official memory of Romanian communism. All this makes the reconstruc-

tion of the militant's biography a difficult task for the researcher. The difficulties are compounded by the various patterns of interpretation, many stereotypical, that have been projected onto the history of interwar communism, both before 1989—when the interpretation of crucial events was distorted while relevant details were deliberately concealed—and after. The post-communist period witnessed the reversal of the previous interpretation of communism into an interpretation just as ideologically driven and reductionist. In effect, new myths about interwar “underground” communism were now created. This brutal paradigm shift did not spare the biographies of the communist leaders, who were turned from heroes into villains.

The present chapter proposes a new interpretive scheme for making sense of the biographies of communist leaders, with particular attention to the underground period, when communist activities were illegal. I will discuss three types of source, each with its merits but also interpretive pitfalls: the myth-biography (Costea 2008), the autobiography, and the personal files compiled by the interwar secret police (*Siguranța*).²

The concept of myth-biography refers to the type of discourse practiced by communist propaganda, usually fitting the underground militants' biographies into a specific pattern. This type of biographical account was coded through a grid that will be referred to as the communist identity discourse, which consisted of a stock of crucial elements for the construction of the model communist biography. The myths interwoven in these biographies should not be approached strictly from a positivist perspective. Rather, the myth-biography served the function of self-representation, operating as a document through which the present could be legitimized with the aid of the past. Autobiography, on the other hand, represents the individual's personal retrospective glance. Here one should distinguish between “institutional” and “literary” autobiography. The former was typically written by a party member while undergoing vetting for promotion within the party ranks. As such, the text was subject to constant updating and rewriting. Literary autobiography, on the other hand, is exemplified by a short resumé of one's personal past, memoirs, and interviews. Finally, the *Siguranța* files document the evolution of

² The *Siguranța* or the Security Police Department (*Direcția Poliției de Siguranță*) was a police service subordinated to the Police and General Security Department (*Direcția Poliției și Siguranței Generale* or DPSG) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

underground communist activists. These files allow us to recover a completely different perspective on the subject. They paint a picture of a clandestine movement shrouded in obscurity, complete with false identities, conspiracy houses, and codenames.

To illustrate my approach, I will focus on the biography of Miron Constantinescu, a Marxist sociologist, underground communist activist, and after the war an important figure in the communist regime. Born in 1917, he joined the communist movement in 1935 as a member of the Communist Youth Union. A year later he became a member of the Romanian Communist Party. In 1941 he was arrested on charges of communist conspiracy and spent the war years in prison. To be sure, the aim of the study is not to give a full account of Constantinescu's time as an underground communist activist. Rather, his case illustrates the larger issues outlined above.

Historiography still lacks thorough research on the leading Romanian communists' biographies and their formative years in the era when the party was illegal. The scarcity of the available historical and archival sources, their subjectivity, and sometimes even their untruthfulness hindered such studies. The extant historical literature focuses mainly on the decision-making period of their lives when they were in power. Still, we can refer to some important biographical approaches that can challenge this narrative: Stelian Tănase, *Auntie Varvara's Clients: Clandestine Histories* (2005), Pavel Câmpeanu, *Ceaușescu: The Countdown Years* (2002), and Robert Levy, *Ana Pauker: The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Communist* (2001). Tănase's and Levy's contributions meticulously reconstruct the personal histories of their subjects during the Communist Party's clandestine era in an attempt to recover and reveal important details of their early biographies. Câmpeanu's goes even further, trying to demonstrate that a thoroughly reconstructed life trajectory is due not only to the logic of the genre. It becomes essential, Câmpeanu argues, in order to understand and depict the complexity of one's biography, of his goals and aspirations, and of his decisions and actions. Still, none of the above approaches challenged these sources and the archival records from a theoretical point of view but merely deciphered and interpreted them in what was considered to be a correct manner. My paper aims to discuss these records, putting them in the context that created them, thus discerning the different types of narratives that are encompassed within these sources.

The myth-biography

The myth-biography of communist propaganda has as its primary purpose the transformation of the underground militant's past into a personal history that meets communist standards. The model was the history of the "experienced leaders," of those who "sacrificed their youth in the name of the people," of the resolute communist militants who were "struggling for the creation of an egalitarian and fair society, for the idea of communism" (Betea 2001, 149–150). From this perspective, the propaganda biography became a discourse replete with symbols and stock motifs meant to create a standardized history. The stories interwoven in the myth-biography are stereotyped accounts, best defined as narrative themes (Costea 2008, 14–17). These narratives had the role of fleshing out and expanding on the basic themes that underlay the communist identity discourse.

In Soviet ideology the biography appears as a cardinal point of reference. In communist society, economic capital ceased to be regarded as the main basis for social rank, while academic capital was marginalized. In these circumstances, a new principle of social distinction was needed. The new criteria were based on "political capital" (Bourdieu 1994, 32), which now became the fundamental element of social identity. The result was the birth of a new communist biographical identity (Pennetier and Pudal 2002, 17), with powerful accents on the "revolutionary class," the proletariat—and its leading force, the party. The social and ideological biography of each person provided the reference point for all societal hierarchies. A proletarian genealogy became highly desirable; indeed, it was a "collective obsession" (Fitzpatrick 2000, 11–13). The genealogical dimension of social identity was doubled by the political trajectory of each individual; these two itineraries determined the structure and intensity of every individual's political capital.

Romanian communist discourse was built on these essential elements, adding local specificity through the emphasis on the underground struggle of Romania's interwar communists. In addition to "proletarian social origin" and "adherence to the communist movement," revolutionary precocity (Fitzpatrick 1989, 251–271; Fitzpatrick 1990, 70–80), clandestine militancy, and imprisonment were highly valued. The texts that fall into the myth-biography category revolve around these main narrative themes. It seems, when skimming through these texts, as if one differs from the other only in the details.

Social origin represented an essential element of everyone's identity under communism. Communist propaganda used the notion of "healthy social origin" to refer both to the working class (the proletariat) and the poor peasantry. In practice, the social stratification of the population rarely matched Marxist theoretical schemes. Social boundaries fluctuated. The working class was a heterogeneous group composed of individuals with different social trajectories that could not be easily assimilated within the model of the proper communist genealogy.

Revolutionary precocity was also considered an important part of communist biographical identity. This concept was based on the idea of an unequal society, which made clear distinctions between the rich and the poor and between the oppressors and the oppressed. The true communist militant was one who took notice of such social injustices from his or her youth (sometimes even from childhood), developing a tendency to struggle against social inequality. Revolutionary precocity resonates with the theme of "the chosen one"—the idea of predestination and revolutionary destiny, dovetailing with the historical determinism so dear to Marxism.

Another important feature of the model communist biography was the episode of one's entrance into the structures coordinated by the party. It was essential to emphasize one's early adherence to the communist cause, as well as one's total and unconditional commitment to the party. Three aspects were emphasized regarding one's motivation for joining the Romanian communist movement in the 1930s: political reasoning, existential motives, and intellectual or ideological commitment (Vigreux 1994, 98–99).

The propaganda biography of each of the "sons of the people" also served the purpose of outlining the image of a heroic activist, a fearless and relentless combatant capable of the supreme sacrifice. It was emphasized that such militants had sacrificed their youth for the people. Communist activism had some defining characteristics during the interwar period. In that era, communist movements were banned in Romania. Thus careerism was out of the question; the tasks assigned to activists exposed them to the risk of prosecution. Indeed, mere membership in a communist organization was a criminal offense. These aspects were invariably stressed—and not infrequently blown out of proportion—in communist model biographies.

Lastly, with over two decades of underground, "illegal" history, Romanian communists looked back on their prison experiences as an important

element in every militant's biography. Imprisonment was the most visible and severe form of political repression. Thus evoking the period of imprisonment became a fertile and recurring theme in communist propaganda discourse (Vigreux 1994, 109). The political repression of communists took place in two stages: the first period, until the outbreak of World War II, when the communists were charged and convicted under the 1924 law that outlawed the Communist Party; and the second period, during the war, when the repression intensified due to the communists having pro-Soviet leanings at a time when Romania was at war with the Soviet Union.

Almost all the communists who held positions of leadership in the party and state apparatus after 1945 had experienced the rigors of imprisonment before the war and internment during the war. Consequently, the prisons where the underground communist activists were imprisoned (Doftana, Caransebeș, Târgu Jiu) became places of memory frequently referenced by party propaganda. Highlighted in the details on the militants' past were the brutal and arbitrary nature of their arrest and detention and the inhumane living conditions in prisons.

Miron Constantinescu's myth-biography rests on several sources: a 1946 propaganda biography, in French, commissioned by the Directorate of Foreign Cultural Relations of the Ministry of Public Information;³ another short biography published in the official party newspaper, *Scântea* (November 16, 1946); and the two obituaries published in *Scântea* (July 19, 1974) and in the *Annals of the Institute for the History of the Communist Party*, 1974 (20, no. 4: 184–185).

The personal history of Miron Constantinescu that emerges from these sources is oversimplified. Constantinescu's biography develops as an idealized narrative structured around the great themes of communist propaganda: a sound social background, revolutionary precocity, firm attachment to the communist cause, and underground activism with its repercussions, the prison sentence. The context in which these two myth-biographies began to circulate is very important. Their propaganda nature is evident: both were drafted during the 1946 election campaign. The text published

³ *Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale* (Romanian National Archives; hereafter ANIC), *Dosare personale ale luptătorilor antifasciști întocmite de Ministerul de Interne în perioada 1917–1944* [Personal files of anti-fascist militants compiled by the Ministry of the Interior between 1917–1944] (hereafter *Militants files*), file Boris Beazi Mavro, microfilm 1235, slides 190–94.

in *Scântea* was aimed at familiarizing voters from the countryside with an important communist candidate—Miron Constantinescu headed the communists' electoral list in Covurlui District. The other text was part of a press dossier, with materials translated into French for the use of the Western media, by the Directorate of Foreign Cultural Relations within the Ministry of Public Information. The aim was once again to publicize the party's candidates in the election, but this time for an international audience. The dossier included thirty-one biographical notices in addition to other propaganda material, for instance, concerning the country's reconstruction after the war. Constantinescu's biography identified him as one of "the leaders of the Communist Youth." Interestingly, only eleven of the thirty-one biographies were of Communist Party members; the other twenty were candidates running on a joint election ticket with the communists. Some were left-leaning intellectuals like C. I. Parhon,⁴ George Enescu, Mihail Sadoveanu,⁵ Gala Galaction,⁶ George Călinescu,⁷ Mihail Ralea,⁸ and Petre Constantinescu-Iași.⁹ Others were "fellow travelers" like the Liberal politician Gheorghe Tătărăscu, Florica Bagdasar,¹⁰ Petru Groza,¹¹ and

⁴ Constantin I. Parhon (1874–1969) was a neuropsychiatrist and politician. He was the first head of the communist Presidium of the Great National Assembly from 1947 to 1952.

⁵ Mihail Sadoveanu (1880–1961) was a well-known interwar writer turned communist politician. In 1946, he became the president of the Romanian Parliament and later enjoyed high-ranking communist positions and privileges.

⁶ Gala Galaction was the pen name of Grigorie Pișculescu (1879–1961). He was a theologian, writer, and leftist activist who, under communism, enjoyed privileges such as being elected member of the Great National Assembly of the Romanian Communist Academy.

⁷ George Călinescu (1899–1965) was a well-known literary critic and writer. Initially persecuted by communists, he was later promoted by the system.

⁸ Mihail Ralea (1896–1964) was a cultural journalist and leftist political figure. He was appointed minister of arts in the first pro-communist government. He enjoyed political influence within the communist party due to his personal bonds, first with Ana Pauker and later with Gheorghiu-Dej.

⁹ Petre Constantinescu-Iași (1892–1977) was a historian and communist politician.

¹⁰ Florica Bagdasar (1901–1978) was a physician and the minister of health between 1946 and 1948.

¹¹ Petru Groza (1884–1958), a lawyer, founded the left-wing agrarian organization known as the Ploughmen's Front (*Frontul Plugarilor*) in 1933. In 1945, he became the prime minister of the first communist-dominated government.

Ștefan Voitec.¹² With this in mind, one can see why, in this particular case, these works no longer focus on the traditional primary goal of biography, that of conveying an individual's personal history, but instead are written to give the appearance of unity among this diverse group of people. Scions of the traditional aristocracy and authentic intellectuals join ranks with peasants and workers to embody the communist ideal of unity across the social spectrum. Seemingly different, their biographies were in fact similar in essence because the point was that all these different people shared the same political conviction.

In addition, two eulogies published after Constantinescu's death essentially glorify his militant past, in the best tradition of communist memorial practices. The influence of communist propaganda on these sources is evident in the careful selection of biographical episodes that would solidify Constantinescu's status as a militant and "son of the people." Not surprisingly, the emphasis is not on the individual's uniqueness but on a stock of social virtues and standards of conduct shared widely. Everything that differed from the social norm or common standard was eliminated from the biography as insignificant or deviant.

As such, the myth-biography is hardly edifying for the historian trying to reconstruct the true life story of the communist militant. The biases of this kind of politicized source reflect a well-known paradox: it was not the past that provided a context in which to make sense of the present and plan for the future, but the present that retrospectively projected meaning onto the events of the past (Boia 2011, 91). Where the interest of the myth-biography lies is in affording a glimpse at the way in which communist propaganda imagined the past—not as it happened, but as it ought to have happened.

Autobiography

The communist obsession with biographical knowledge can be related to the eagerness of the triumphant party to stay informed about its own members' opinions and to control individuals' lives (Pennetier and Pudal 2002, 16). The biographical control policy represented the core of personnel selection:

¹² Ștefan Voitec (1900–1984), a member of the Romanian Social Democratic Party, advocated union with the Romanian Communist Party, which took place in November 1947.

before being admitted into the party, each applicant was required to write an autobiography in which he would develop a range of topics, using a questionnaire as a starting point (Werth 1981, 16). This impressive “biographical culture,” typical of communist regimes, had at least two purposes. First, it proposed a detailed portrait of the individual as a describable and analyzable object. Second, it amounted to the establishment of a comparative system for measuring whole social phenomena, describing social groups, characterizing collective actions, and categorizing individuals within them (Foucault 1993, 224). This type of autobiography, which Bernard Pudal calls “institutional autobiography” (Pudal and Pennetier 1996, 53–75), became one’s personal history in relation to the party. It represented a powerful way of articulating the difference between the activist integrated within the party’s structures and “the others” (e.g., the bourgeoisie).

The stock motifs and themes of the institutional autobiography facilitated the individual’s task of reassessing and rewriting his or her activist past (Pennef 1979, 53–82). Within these texts, the cleavage between public and private disappeared, and the most intimate personal secrets became party secrets. Personal retrospection was modeled according to the landmarks of an ideal communist history. Social origin, seniority within the party, and communist activity were the crucial themes, but all issues were developed in intimate detail, as each individual was asked to provide information even (for example) about distant relatives. This symbolic gesture had the purpose of highlighting, once again, the difference between communists and their opponents (Pennef 1979, 59).

A key aspect for the researcher is that these institutional autobiographies were subject to close verification by the department that carefully supervised the party’s cadres—the Personnel Office of the Communist Party (Chelcea 2000; Oprea 2002; Muraru 2005). As such, blatantly untrue or grossly fabricated biographical information is rarely found in these sources.

Alongside institutional autobiography, one encounters what might be called literary autobiography: short retrospective texts, memoirs, testimonies, and interviews. The usefulness of such sources lies in their less rigid nature. They were not subject to the constraints of the questionnaire on which institutional autobiographies were based. On the other hand, the objectivity of such a discourse cannot be easily verified through other sources. As such, literary autobiography can be an important historical source, inasmuch as it sheds new light on the mili-

tant's past, but its accuracy must be carefully checked whenever different sources offer useful clues.

Autobiography is more than just a record of the author's past. It also represents the quest for the meaning of his or her life (Bourdieu 1986, 69). The autobiographical discourse is always informed by the concern for retrospectively discovering a unifying thread through one's life, thus suggesting more coherence and constancy than was the case. Autobiography seeks to establish a coherent relation between successive states, which are thus constituted as stages of an ideal and necessary development of the self. The author tells his or her story from the perspective of the present, trying to reconstruct the past in terms that could substantiate and validate his becoming (Bonvalot 2004, 86–87).

Constantinescu has left behind both an institutional and a literary autobiography. The former, part of his personnel file, dates from September 1945.¹³ It may very well have been written in anticipation of the party's national conference of October 1945, a major event since it was the first of its kind after the end of the “underground” period; most importantly, the conference was tasked with electing the party's new leadership. As it turned out, Constantinescu was voted a member of both the Central Committee and the Politburo, making him one of the seven most important figures in the Romanian Communist Party.

The literary autobiography of his revolutionary youth, titled *The Way of a Generation*, was drafted twenty-five years later, in 1970 (Constantinescu 1970, 14–18). The title says it all: the text is not about the individual but the collective self; not “I” but “we,” the predestined generation. This emphasizes the idea of becoming part of a group that had been given a crucial historical mission. These additions and distortions must be understood as an effort to prepare one's future career and, at the same time, search for the meaning of one's activist life. Consequently, the individual self is often replaced by the collective “we.” The goal is to emphasize one's membership in a group that was endowed by Providence with a historical mission, following the model of “the October (i.e., 1917) Revolution generation.”

The institutional autobiography is crucial in any attempt to reconstruct the biography of a communist militant. The autobiography centered

¹³ ANIC, database *Dosare personale ale membrilor de partid din ilegalitate care au încetat din viață* [Deceased party members' files], Folder C/161 (Miron Constantinescu), Files 12–15.

on the individual's relationship to the party. As noted above, the Personnel Section of the Party examined such texts carefully, and thus they would not usually contain gross fabrications. Constantinescu's autobiography was carefully worded and included specific details on his revolutionary past. Interestingly, it barely touches upon his intellectual activity and personal life, probably because these did not seem important for building his credentials as a communist leader. Instead, there is more commentary on his underground activities and his years as a political prisoner—formative years, as he calls them. By contrast, the literary autobiography written twenty-five years later, free of institutional constraints, delves into other aspects of Constantinescu's past.

Written twenty-five years apart, the two texts articulate different perspectives on the past. The rigor of the institutional autobiography of 1945 is replaced in 1970 by the serene, almost nostalgic evocation of youth. The selection of key autobiographical episodes similarly registers an evolution. In 1970 there are no more references to Constantinescu's "sound" social origin or to his prison years. The focus has shifted to his development as an intellectual, referring, for instance, to the books that marked his adolescence and youth.

What unites the two texts, in spite of their significant differences, is that each reflects the party's interest, at a specific historical junction, in rewriting or just reinterpreting the obscure period of its history, the underground years. The two autobiographies trace the fluid, shifting nature of the past under the totalitarian regime.

The Secret Police files

Founded in 1921 as a branch of the Third Communist International, the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) was outlawed in 1924, following the involvement of some communist militants in the disorders in southern Bessarabia (Tismăneanu 2003, 53–54). For the next two decades, Romanian communism was a clandestine movement, functioning under the strict rules of political conspiracy. Each communist militant took on a secret life, with code names, false IDs, and an almost impenetrable web of personal and professional relationships.

Anyone who joined the movement and became a militant activist ran the risk of criminal prosecution. Adherence to the movement was thus an existential conversion—a radical transformation of public and private life,

of one's worldview and personal relationships (McAdam 1989, 745). The total and long-term commitment to the cause had severe consequences at the individual level, completely changing one's daily routine and lifestyle (Hirsch 1990, 244).

In spite of Romanian communists' continuous efforts to keep their conspiratorial activities secret, few of their actions remained unknown to the state security police. Founded in 1919, the Security Police Department (*Siguranța*) always kept an eye on the activities of the Communist Party—particularly after 1924. Individual police files were put together for every underground militant whose doings could be documented. Furthermore, a significant amount of data was recorded in the “target objective” files, which traced the activity of the organizations considered to be “camouflaged communist” associations: newspapers, magazines, trade unions, and student associations.

In the Security Police records, Miron Constantinescu had several personal files. One of them (in several volumes, but not too sizeable) was completed in 1941, following his arrest.¹⁴ There is another personal file, drafted after his release from prison (August 25, 1944), which includes surveillance reports.¹⁵ Furthermore, Constantinescu's first extant file (1941) includes a statement to the effect that his case was already on record in the archives of the *Siguranța*. Finally, his name inevitably appears in other files, such as those of N. D. Cocea¹⁶ and Mihail Dragomirescu.¹⁷ Besides the first two files,¹⁸ the others are quite difficult to identify, since their shelfmarks refer to the archive of an institution that ceased to exist in 1948. But the information provided by the first file allows us to reconstruct at least some parts of Miron Constantinescu's illegal activity.

¹⁴ ANIC, Database *Militants files*, File Miron Gh. Constantinescu, Microfilm 1208, 1212.

¹⁵ ANIC, Database *Militants files*, File Miron Gh. Constantinescu, Microfilm 1208.

¹⁶ N. D. Cocea was a journalist, novelist, critic, and left-wing political activist during the interwar period who rose to prominence as an official writer for the communist regime after 1948.

¹⁷ Mihail Dragomirescu, a well-known interwar critic with left-wing political sympathies.

¹⁸ ANIC, Database *Militants files*, File Miron Gh. Constantinescu, Microfilm 1208, slide 502.

The overall image that these files offer is incongruous with what the myth-biography and the autobiographical texts suggest. There is nothing heroic in these histories. It is only the story of a sect with few adherents, some of whom were socially marginalized, or intellectually mediocre, and sometimes prone to betray their comrades. These files paint the portraits of petty characters who often played a double role, at once communist activists and police informants who “sold their comrades down the river,” as the saying went (Tănase 2005). The discovery and annihilation of an entire regional communist structure—the “Lower Danube” network—is linked to the arrest of Miron Constantinescu. Having been monitored for some time by the police and the Siguranța, this regional communist network was annihilated in less than two days. The first arrests occurred on the night of January 9–10, 1941, and by January 11, most of the members of the network were detained and interrogated. Once detained, the underground activists had difficulties protecting their comrades and maintaining the secrecy they had been sworn into, as some of them were police informers. The group utterly collapsed.

These files are still significant, as they can help us revise some important aspects of Miron Constantinescu’s biography. They shed new light on Constantinescu’s clandestine activities after 1935, when he joined the Communist Youth Union. Thus we learn that few of the activities that communist propaganda attributed to Miron Constantinescu can be confirmed independently. He had indeed caught the attention of the Siguranța and had a personal file in the archives of the secret police. His articles for leftist journals and magazines had been noted, as well as his involvement in various organizations known as “camouflaged communist” movements (the Students’ Democratic Front and the Romanian-French Association). But importantly, there is no mention of his alleged participation in strikes and students’ riots. Still, even if these files are official documents issued by a state institution, their objectivity should not be taken for granted. The sources of the data compiled by the secret police often remain unknown. Moreover, no other sources are available to confirm or refute these data.

A key element of Miron Constantinescu’s biography was his arrest in January 1941. Following this arrest, Constantinescu spent the war years in the prisons of Caransebeș and Lugoj, together with important communist leaders (Câmpeanu 2002, 54). In those years Constantinescu’s role and position in the party increased exponentially. On the other hand, as

I have already suggested, the prison experience served as the mechanism of legitimation after the war, when the communists were in power. It was part of the propaganda image of a worthy past. In light of this, it is not surprising that the events leading to Constantinescu's arrest in 1941 have been reworked and distorted by communist propaganda.

The propaganda presented Constantinescu as the principal architect of the reorganization of the "Lower Danube" regional network (which encompassed the counties of southeastern Moldova and southern Bessarabia) following its first demise in 1939 under a coordinated police and Siguranța action. Most of its members were arrested or fled to the Soviet Union, and the network effectively ceased to exist. It is against this background that Constantinescu's arrival in the autumn of 1940 is depicted. His mission, it was claimed, was to reorganize the regional communist structures. But the police files contradict the communist propaganda story. Miron Constantinescu's role in the reorganization of the regional network was hardly as important as was suggested. His real assignment was to reorganize and coordinate, at an unspecified time in the future, the youth branch of the organization. Even the real story of his arrest is hardly heroic, as Constantinescu was taken into custody by chance, following a police search of his host's house in Galați. And here we run into a problem. The police and Siguranța reports show indisputably that Constantinescu's role and underground activities in Galați were insignificant. However, six months later, the Third Army Military Court condemned him to ten years of hard labor and another ten years of social exclusion—one of the harshest sentences of the "Lower Danube" communist organization trial. The sentence reflected Constantinescu's status as the only activist of the group to have been sent to Galați from the capital city, Bucharest, by the Communist Central Committee.

Conclusion

The interwar history of the Romanian Communist Party has yet to be written. Even after 1989, the perception of this history as little more than a myth fabricated by communist propaganda was not conducive to nuanced, careful assessments. Rather, the tone was set by efforts to debunk the myths surrounding the party's history—a form of what might be called historiographical exorcism, inasmuch as its aim was simply to mark the break with the recent, communist past.

The historian who tackles the topic faces three major hurdles. First, the ideologically driven communist propaganda often distorted the party's history, imbuing the militants' biographies with its deceitful rhetoric. It was one of the tasks of the present article to identify the main themes of this propaganda but also to acknowledge and record the extent of these misinterpretations or deceptions. Second, the post-communist years have witnessed an obsession to regard everything pertaining to the history of communism as essentially false and harmful. Third, there seems to be a compulsion to position oneself on one or the other side of the barricade, which often leads to the highly questionable approach of merely hunting for oversights and contradictions in the communist-era texts in order to expose them as propaganda and distortions of the historical record—rather than trying first to make sense of the complex context in which these texts were put together.

In the case of Miron Constantinescu's biography as a communist militant, I have shown how important events of his life are treated differently in different kinds of sources. Rather than hunting for distortions or falsehoods in the sources, I argue that to make sense of such discrepancies, it is best to view them as different versions of one's personal history, each produced in different historical contexts.

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Luciana-Marioara Jinga

Women in the Communist Party: Debunking a (Post-)Communist Mythology

Introduction

The Romanian Communist Party (RCP) introduced what was called “egalitarian legislation” in an effort to meet the demands of Marxist-Leninist doctrine. Despite the legislative measures, the percentage of women within the RCP remained, for the first three decades of communism, one of the lowest among the communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, comparable perhaps with that of Yugoslavia (Tomšič 1980). To encourage women to join the party, in the mid-1970s, Nicolae Ceaușescu’s regime introduced the principle of mandatory quotas for women, as members and candidates, in all party structures. A few women were even catapulted into positions of leadership (without any professional merit). Many considered these nominations to be simply a mechanism to fill party quotas. Despite all these measures, Ceaușescu’s program had little success: the rate of women joining the party did not differ at all from the previous periods. In November 1989, about 36 percent of party members were women. As regards leadership and senior management, except for the small group surrounding Elena Ceaușescu, female participation stayed modest.

This reality was and still is all but ignored in the public space, as well as in the historiography of the period. After 1989, the women who held positions of authority in the Romanian Communist Party were represented, without exception, as the incarnation of absolute evil. In these interpretations, the only thing more abhorrent than these women’s char-

acters was their lack of education (Olteanu, Gheonea, and Gheonea 2003; Petre 1995). On the other hand, women as a whole are also depicted as the victims of the regime's pronatalist policy.

My chapter aims at analyzing the political and historiographical myth that women constituted a harmful presence in Romanian politics during the communist regime. For the purpose of this study, in defining myth, I follow Georges Sorel (2004, 20), who defined political myth as a form of deliberately manipulative communication for ideological purposes. Beyond the traditional true/false dichotomy, myths represent the beliefs of a certain group of the population, beliefs that can and must be considered capable of producing action in the present (Sorel 2004, 29).

The roots of the myth of a sinister presence of women in politics can be identified in the distinctive features showed by the former communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of the communist regimes. Vladimir Tismăneanu (1998, 208) states that "in the first ten years of post-Communism we dealt with a resilient, persistent form of barbarism that was situated in the very heart of modernity. Radical nationalism was the absolute exacerbation of difference, its reification, the rejection of the claim to a common humanity, and the proclamation of the ethno-national distinction as the primordial fact of human existence." We can add to the list the sexist, misogynist attitudes that came as a return to what some called "traditional values" from before the communist era.

In the absence of a lustration law, of definitive sentences for those identified as responsible for political crimes before 1989, condemnations of the communist regime were supplemented and often even replaced by political myths (such as the myth of a golden age, the myth of a lost paradise, the myth of unity, and so on). Vladimir Tismăneanu (1998, 12) explains that "political myths have the power to satisfy this immediate understanding, causalities being simplified or invented."

The return towards an idealized past had a concrete effect—the construction of another political myth that can be considered a framework for all the other political myths concerning Romania's recent history. That is the myth of the communist regime as a historical period without any positive effects on society. Agnes Horvath (2008, 28–29) called it "*anulla*" or "the absolute nothing," considering this ideological and theoretical desert to be the "only visible thing on the ruins of communism."

My study questions this mythological idea that describes communism as a political form incapable of producing any innovative, modern

structures in Romanian society. My approach is an attempt to debunk this myth, although I am aware that most scholars in political science agree that, given its structure, a myth cannot be deconstructed. According to Michael Shafir (2006), a myth can only be replaced.

In my study, I will focus mainly on the political representation of women during the communist regime, using a classic methodology in gender studies and women's history. The structure of my chapter, although it does not follow the myth content, seeks to offer an historical interpretation, apart from the influence of other political myths regarding the Romanian communist regime.

After the fall of communism, in a society that traditionally discouraged the political participation of women, some historians discredited the idea of women as political actors. They explained the equality policies introduced by the Ceaușescu regime as motivated solely by the desire to promote Elena Ceaușescu, reducing all women in positions of authority to the single cult of the dictator's wife. The demonization of Elena Ceaușescu and of the group of women who held positions of authority in the 1970s and 1980s reinforced prejudices that women were less capable of governing.

In order to use a coherent, comprehensive, and comparative approach concerning the political participation of the governed female population, our study undertakes a qualitative and quantitative analysis. The qualitative analysis concentrates on institutional and legislative deconstruction, based mostly on primary sources that have recently become available to researchers. As for the quantitative approach, its statistical concepts and principles proved particularly useful in retracing the evolution of women's representation within the Romanian Communist Party and its leading structures. In order to point out the real nature of women's political representation during the communist regime, I will focus my analysis on two major axes: the presence of women within the Romanian Communist Party, including leading positions, and the overlapping of functions.

Women's presence within the Communist Party

In retracing the presence of women as party members, we can easily distinguish two periods of time. The first one began during the interwar period, and it continued until the late 1950s; it is mostly characterized

by the fragmentary nature of the source material available to historians. Starting with the Third Congress of the Romanian Workers' Party (RWP) (1960) until the fall of communism, especially after Nicolae Ceaușescu came to power, gender concerns became more present not only in official propaganda but also in the party's official documents.

Establishing the exact number of members of the Romanian Communist Party from its creation in 1921 until 1945 has proven particularly challenging and has prompted endless disputes among historians. Ioan Chiper (1998), in his study of the evolution and ethnic structure of the RCP between 1921 and 1952, estimates the total number of party members at the end of the 1930s at about 2,500 persons. Three hundred of them were women.¹

In February 1948, following the unification of the Social Democratic Party and the Romanian Communist Party, the new political entity, the Romanian Workers' Party, had 1,057,428 members. In the months that followed, the party shrank substantially; in November 1948, the RWP had no more than 900,000 members. Between November 1948 and May 1950, the RWP conducted background checks of all party members. As a result of this procedure, 192,000 people were expelled from the party in July 1950. Thus in 1950, the party counted 709,476 members.

In the following years the decline continued, although the purges did not reach the magnitude of those registered between 1948 and 1950. Ioan Chiper explains this decline by a change in the party's internal mechanism that asserted more rigorous control over the admission of party candidates. The party also managed to carefully keep track of its active members (Chiper 1998, 25–41). In my opinion, this hypothesis also implies that all previous numbers are questionable, as the party itself did not have clear knowledge about the corpus of its members. In a report dated July 1, 1953, the RWP officially recorded 585,087 members. The number of members increased steadily in the months preceding the Third Congress of the RWP, reaching 834,600 in 1960 and 1,518,000 at the end of 1963.

Until the Third Congress of the Romanian Workers' Party, the statistics focused strictly on the numerical evolution and the distribution

¹ According to the files found in the Romanian Central National Archives (ANIC), database Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party—Section Chancellery, Folder 8/1979, 5/1981, 10/1988.

of party members according to social criteria, ethnic origin, age, and seniority within the movement. The distribution of party members by sex was not considered important enough to be included in the various reports on the party structure (Chiper 1998). This silence could be interpreted as proof that the presence of women within the party was insignificant, an assumption supported by the slow numerical growth of the Women's Antifascist Union of Romania, which attracted no more than 200 activists nationwide.

In 1948, during the First Congress of the RWP, women participants accounted for 13.5 percent (*Congresul Partidului Muncitoresc Român* 1948, 52). A year later, in 1949, reporting on women's political involvement, Ana Pauker and Constanța Crăciun publicly expressed their dissatisfaction with the proportion of women in party structures, which did not exceed 8 percent. Six years later, during the Second Congress of the RWP (December 1955), the percentage of women went up only slightly, to 9 percent of all members in the party's local branches. The situation was better for the delegates attending the congress, among whom women represented 19.9 percent (*Congresul al II-lea* 1956, 292–294).

The first official information about the proportion of women within the party is presented during the Third Congress of the RWP, when women candidates and party members represented 17 percent of the total.

During the official meetings, the party leadership never forgot to stress that more women needed to join the party as active members and that it was the party's responsibility to make this a reality. The communist officials felt that an increased presence of women within the party should coincide with their promotion in management positions. In 1965, when Nicolae Ceaușescu came to power, the numbers showed beyond any doubt that little was actually done to assure a wider presence of women inside the party and/or in management positions.

While the women's mass organization² reached 1.5 million members in 1950, the purge of Ana Pauker from public and political life, as well as

² Under communism, women's mass organizations included various associations such as the Union of Antifascist Women, created in 1945, and the Democratic Federation of Romanian Women, created in 1946, which changed its name in 1948 to the Union of the Democratic Women of Romania (which was dissolved in 1953). In 1957 a new mass organization was created, the National Council of Women, which lasted until the fall of communism in 1989.

the dissolution of the Union of Democratic Women in Romania in 1953, represented a significant step backwards in terms of women's political involvement.

Before 1965, as the party official with direct responsibility for the activity of the communist women's mass organization, Nicolae Ceaușescu knew about, ordered, and directly coordinated many of the major projects of the Women's National Council, including those concerning the promotion of women in both political and professional leading positions. Subsequently, his speeches supporting more representation for women in leading roles seem to be a natural extension of his previous concerns. At that time, the presence of women in the party was 21 percent, while the percentage of women in the total workforce was 27.8 percent, one of the lowest rates in the communist bloc, close to that registered by Yugoslavia. Nicolae Ceaușescu saw a direct correlation between the women's political involvement and their professional activity. The communist leader appealed to party organizations "to promote women on a greater scale in leading political structures, to improve the management of women's committees and councils in order to ensure greater participation of women in all the educational, cultural, and social projects for the realization of party policies" (Ceaușescu 1983). These new political figures could provide role models for other women by showing that, like men, women were entitled to participate in politics (*România Liberă* 1985, 1987).

The second period began with the rise to power of Nicolae Ceaușescu in 1965. In the 1970s there were major public calls for a more substantial promotion of women within the party and its leading positions. This trend culminated with the June 1973 decision by the Plenary of the Romanian Communist Party's Central Committee establishing quotas for women's nomination to party membership and election in the leading structure of the party. Nevertheless, this official act produced poor results (*Congresul al XI-lea* 1975, 69).

Between the Ninth and the Eleventh RCP Congress, women's presence in the party increased by only 4 percentage points, to 25 percent (Jinga 2011, 206–207). Such an increase was certainly far from a revolution in women's representation. Nevertheless, if we take into consideration the actual numbers, the perspective is different. The total number of party members grew sharply by one million in a decade, from 1,450,000 to 2,480,000 in 1974. The introduction, in 1976, of a gender quota for

all the leading positions within the party was the clearest signal given in favor of increasing the number of women party members, and implicitly, of promoting them into management positions. The critics of the communist regime used this gender quota to explain the political mistakes made by the Romanian Communist Party. According to them, the women who joined the party and occupied positions of authority were elected not according to merit but only to fill the mandatory quotas. In fact, the numerical growth was not at all different from the previous period, the increase being approximately 1 percentage point every two years (Jinga 2011, 207). In order to better control the admission process, the Plenary Session of the RCP of March 1983 required that 50 percent of party candidates be women. This measure can be considered a promise of a (rather distant) future parity within the party.

For women, especially those holding a university degree, joining the party proved extremely difficult, as they were considered intellectuals and, according to the party's internal rules, their number was strictly controlled. The situation did not change significantly even after the first representation quotas were introduced in 1976. In 1986, the rate was 34.06 percent (the average growth remained at 0.7 points per year). It reached a maximum of 36 percent in 1989 (Jinga 2011, 207).

The Romanian case is unique in the communist bloc. In less than two decades, the female presence in the Romanian Communist Party went from one of the lowest rates in any communist country to, in 1989, the best position. Unlike in neighboring countries and the USSR, in Romania women were admitted to the Communist Party at a gradual and steady rate. What was distinctive about Ceaușescu's regime was its consistency in promoting and implementing measures of equal representation for men and women in both party and state positions.

Women as party leaders

Women's numerically significant presence within the party did not lead to a similar representation in political leadership. Between October 1945 and December 1989, 283 women were elected to the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party. The distribution is uneven for full members and alternates, as well as during different periods in the party's evolution, as the table below shows.

YEAR	Full Members			Alternates		
	Total	women	%	Total	women	%
1945	27	3	11.1	8	1	12.5
1948	41	5	12.1	16	2	12.5
1955	61	3	4.9	35	4	11.4
1960	79	5	6.3	31	2	6.4
1965	121	5	4.1	75	5	6.6
1969	165	6	3.6	120	5	4.1
1974	205	10	5.0	156	26	16.6
1979	245	48	19.5	163	50	30.6
1985	265	54	20.3	181	73	40.3
1989	287	66	23.0	192	79	41.1

Table 1. Presence of women within the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party. 1945–1989.

After August 23, 1944, the only female political figure in the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party was Ana Pauker. Few women joined various organizations such as the Patriotic Defense, the Patriotic Union, and the Red Aid but were not brought into the small ruling group formed by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, Gheorghe Apostol, Chivu Stoica, Nicolae Ceaușescu, Miron Constantinescu, Iosif Chișinevschi, Teohari Georgescu, and Ion Gheorghe Maurer.

The creation of a women's organization under the direct coordination of the Communist Party had a powerful effect in coalescing the work of female party members. At the party's national conference in October 1945, elected to the Party Central Committee alongside Ana Pauker were Constanța Crăciun and Elena Tudorache, who had been activists during the interwar period. In 1948, following the merger of the RCP with the Social Democratic Party, Eugenia Rădăceanu joined the group of women in the party's central management. The proportion of women in the Central Committee, although not very significant, reflected the women's proportion in the party. The purge of Ana Pauker and the dissolution of the women's mass organization curbed the presence of women

in the party leadership; only three of sixty-one members (5 percent) were women. From the initial group, only Constanța Crăciun kept her mandate; the other two seats were occupied by Ghizela Vass and Elena Lascu Iordăchescu. These choices show the reluctance of the leadership in promoting women who joined the party after August 23, 1944. Until the late 1960s, the number of women in the Central Committee (five) remained constant, although the total number of members gradually increased (*Congresul al II-lea* 1956, 887–890; *Congresul al III-lea* 1960, 725–728; *Congresul al IX-lea* 1965, 735–739).

In 1973, despite the election of Elena Ceaușescu and Lina Ciobanu, the proportion of women in the Central Committee was the same: 5 percent. Better statistics were registered for alternate members, where the rate increased to 16.6 percent (twenty-six women).

An important shift appears during the Twelfth RCP Congress (1979), when thirty-six women were elected as full members as a result of the quota established three years earlier. Although the number is important, we must point out that the total number of members in the Central Committee went up to 245 persons, and the proportion of women did not exceed 20 percent. The numbers seem to confirm our hypothesis concerning the real motivation and the actual effects of the decision taken during the Central Committee Plenary of June 18–19, 1973. In the mid-1970s, the priority of the communist leaders was to insure a wider presence of women in the total labor force, and to a lesser extent to increase the political participation of women, the second measure being only a simple alignment to the legislation of other communist countries in the region and a clear sign of following the Soviet model in terms of gender policies. Until the fourteenth and last RCP Congress, in November 1989, women's presence in the Central Committee—similar to that within the party—had been trending upward, but it failed to reach the 25 percent quota (Jinga 2011, 210).

Women were more numerous among alternate members. The numbers grow steadily starting with the party's Eleventh Congress (1974), when the percentage rose to 16.6 percent. Similarly to the case of full members, the Twelfth Congress registered a further increase, up to 30 percentage points, with fifty representatives in the group of deputies. In 1989, 41 percent of the alternates in the Central Committee were women. Although the alternate members were not totally devoid of importance, they did not possess the same power of representation as the full

members, as their presence in the meetings was required only to replace a permanent member who was temporarily absent.

**Women's presence in the Political Bureau / Political Committee /
Executive Political Committee / Secretariat**

The Central Committee elected two executive forums, each consisting of a limited number of members. The first was the Political Bureau / Political Committee, which, starting in 1976, changed its name to the Executive Political Committee. This organ was responsible for directing the party's activities between the plenary sessions. The president of the Women's National Council was automatically elected in the Executive Political Committee, as a full member or as an alternate.

Within this governing body, the presence of women was not consistent. For eight years, between 1945 and 1953, Ana Pauker was the only woman in the Political Bureau. After she was purged, the Political Bureau, and later the Executive Political Committee, remained composed exclusively of males for the next twenty years. In 1973, two women were elected to this influential committee: Elena Ceaușescu and Lina Ciobanu. Their election coincided with the decision to increase the role of women in society, which prompted many historians to conclude that this measure was taken to justify the political rise of Elena Ceaușescu. Undoubtedly, the spectacular political rise of the latter can be explained by her spousal relationship with the head of state. However, I do not think that all the measures meant to increase women's political participation can be explained away as resulting from the unique case of Elena Ceaușescu (Kunze 2002). It is also said that Lina Ciobanu was elected not on merit but only to reinforce and justify the position that Elena Ceaușescu held in the party. However, unlike Ceaușescu's wife, Lina Ciobanu³ had gradually built a political career as first secretary of a local district in Bucharest, first secretary of the Bucharest regional committee in the early 1960s, and starting in 1965, a member of the Central Committee. Her trajectory perfectly fits the pattern of all other important communist politicians in Romania, including members of the Central

³ According to her personal folder at ANIC, database Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party—Personal file C/2080.

Committee, and it certainly justifies her election in the leading bodies of the Central Committee.

In my opinion, the decisions of 1973 and 1976 were taken to legitimate the communist regime and eventually to improve the results of various state policies, such as the demographic program, or to encourage women to join the workforce.

Beginning in 1974, the Executive Political Committee elected its Permanent Bureau, where, for its entire existence, only one woman was elected (in 1977): Elena Ceaușescu.

Apart from the Executive Political Committee and its Permanent Bureau, the Secretariat was the second political body that organized and controlled the implementation of party decisions, while ensuring the selection, training, and assignment distribution for the *nomenklatura* members. Ana Pauker was the only woman appointed as a full member in the Secretariat from October 1945 until May 27, 1952 (Levy 2002, 43). During the first years of communism, Ana Pauker was undoubtedly the most influential woman in Romanian politics. Her level of authority was reached only by the political couple Elena Ceaușescu and Lina Ciobanu.

The general public perception that a significant number of women were appointed to leadership positions after Nicolae Ceaușescu took power is not confirmed by the statistics. Instead, for the first fifteen years of Ceaușescu's regime, until the Twelfth Party Congress, despite the official discourse praising gender equality, delivered during the meetings with the representatives of the women's mass organization, and the decisions taken by the Central Committee, the situation remained the same as under Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, with few women in either politics or management positions.

Following the implementation of a quota of at least 25 percent women in party structures at the central and local level, the proportion of women in the party increased. The same process can be observed regarding representation in positions of authority. The best performance was achieved at the Twelfth Congress, when women represented 23 percent of the total membership of the Central Committee. Subsequently the rate gradually dropped to reach, before the fall of the regime in December 1989, a mere 9.5 percent. The only women elected to the Executive Political Committee in November 1989 were, once again, Elena Ceaușescu and Lina Ciobanu.

If for the Executive Political Committee the regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu truly represented a turnaround, with a peak of 20 percent reached

in 1979, for the Permanent Bureau the situation stayed much the same, with only one female member, Elena Ceaușescu. There was even less representation of women in the party's secretariat; Ana Pauker was the only woman elected to this leading party structure.

The overlapping

The total number of women (as well as men) holding positions of authority from the mid-1970s until December 1989 should not be interpreted as representing an equal number of individuals in the respective functions. The rule used in the distribution of positions was that the party's political functions would be doubled by issuing state positions at the same level of authority. The equivalent of the party committee at the local level was the People's Council, and the party's Central Committee was directly related to the Grand National Assembly, as a presence on the Executive Political Committee was usually accompanied by a ministerial portfolio (prime minister or deputy prime minister). This is why the political participation of women is presented in a completely biased manner by communist propaganda that artificially doubled the real presence of women in decision-making positions.

Forty percent of all women elected at the National Assembly between 1985 and December 1989 were, at the same time, full members of or alternates in the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party. All female members of the government were also elected to the Executive Political Committee of the RCP.

In the cabinet formed in 1985, the two women holding a ministerial portfolio, Maria Flucșă and Maria Bobu, were not in leadership positions within the Central Committee. This exceptional situation does not mean that the two women politicians were more independent from the party line. Both women were full members of the Central Committee and cultivated close relations with the other members of the government. Maria Flucșă was the successor of Lina Ciobanu as minister of light industry. Her promotion came after a thirty-year-long career in the management of various industrial plants and ten years of experience in ministerial positions, as deputy minister of domestic trade (1977–1984) and secretary at the Ministry of Light Industry. This political resume was supplemented by a very active presence within the various boards and mass organizations: member of the Board of the Women's National

Council, member of the Supreme Council of Economic and Social Development, member of the Committee for People's Problems, member of the Workers' Central Council, and member of the Control Body of Economic and Social Activities. In 1980, she was elected to the Grand National Assembly.⁴ This overlapping of functions, however, has given the public image of an omnipresent female presence in leadership positions, both in civic organizations and in the bodies of the party and state institutions.

Conclusion

At the end of the communist era, women as party members were more numerous in Romania than in other communist countries. However, female representation at the highest political level never reached the officially established quotas. In the early years of the communist regime, the most important female political figure was Ana Pauker. Her level of authority was matched in the 1980s by the political couple Elena Ceaușescu and Lina Ciobanu.

The political myth that an impressive number of women held positions of leadership after Nicolae Ceaușescu took power is not confirmed by statistics. Instead, for the first fifteen years of Ceaușescu's regime, despite the rhetoric of conferences organized by the women's mass organization and the decisions of the Central Committee, the situation remained the same as under his predecessor, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej.

After the communist regime's collapse, the number of women involved in politics drastically diminished. The low presence of women in all political structures during the last twenty-five years can be attributed to the post-communist propaganda that demonized women's presence in politics based on a mythology that women in the communist-era leadership were numerous and incompetent. The European Union has called on Romania to improve women's representation, but even after Romania's 2007 accession to the EU, women are still underrepresented in the country's Parliament, government, and local political structures.

⁴ ANIC, database Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party—Personal file F/139.

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Claudia-Florentina Dobre

Avatars of the Social Imaginary: Myths about Romanian Communism after 1989

After the fall of communism in December 1989, a feverish period of political and social changes ensued. A new political order took shape, instituted by and instituting a new social imaginary. In the process, old myths were brought back to life in order to give meaning and significance to the new reality, as well as to determine political and social cohesion and coherence.

This chapter looks at the structures of the post-communist social imaginary in Romania through the lenses of the mythology constructed to make sense of the past and to provide significance to the present. In this context, myth refers to a fictional construct, such as a narrative or an idea, which puts forth social and historical explanations that serve the needs of the community, for instance, by building social consensus (Boia 2000, 39). The crucial point of this definition is that myths are fundamentally rooted in the cultural memory of a society.¹ It follows from this that myth is not simply a matter of truth or falsehood. Instead, myths define the aspirations and projects of a community and can offer a basis for

¹ Cultural memory is defined here, following Jan Assmann, as: "...a form of collective memory, in the sense that it is shared by a number of people and that it conveys to these people a collective, that is, a cultural identity" (Assmann 2010, 110). See more on this in the introduction.

social mobilization. Myths provide fundamental cognitive schemata for mapping the social world (Flood 1996). They encourage people to take action as they answer a need for significance (Bottici 2007, 180).

The present chapter deals mainly with political myths of the first two decades of the Romanian post-communist period. According to Raoul Girardet (1997), modern political myths are not fundamentally different from traditional myths. For example, the myth of unity is still present in modern society, albeit in different forms. The modern nation can in fact be viewed as a “secular religion” founded on the dogma of unity. Furthermore, various politicians have presented themselves at one time or another as the nation’s savior. Similarly, modern (and postmodern) conspiracy theories have all the ingredients of older political mythology.

Political myths refer not to their content but to a particular political context that “makes significance” for a certain group or society (Bottici 2007, 180). Political myths are always told from the standpoint of the present, and they are constantly updated (Bottici 2007, 183). Furthermore, modern political myths entail the same processes of production, reception, and reproduction as traditional myths (Bottici and Challand 2013, 91).

In this chapter, I argue that post-communist political myths played an important role in providing schemata of Romania’s recent past, as well as giving significance to the new political order. They presented themselves as models of and for Romanian society. Furthermore, myths were a means of addressing the communist past from the standpoint of the present.

Shortly after Ceaușescu’s fall from power and execution in December 1989, some attempts were made to explain the former regime and articulate new social identities by turning to myth-making. Old political myths, revived and adapted to the new realities, were put forward in order to provide simple, clear-cut accounts of the advent of communism in Romania after World War II. They also sought to explain the mechanisms that kept communists in power for more than four decades, as well as the fall of their regime (various conspiracy theories). Myths were also used to articulate social programs for a brighter future (notably by espousing the principles behind the West’s success and looking back at interwar Romania as a golden age of intellectual achievement), to strengthen social ties after the demise of the old order (thus the “revolution” of December 1989 was seen as the defining moment of national unity as well as the starting point of a new national construction), and to promote new social and political identities, such as anticommunism.

The victimization myth

In recent Romanian history, the long-documented myth of the political conspiracy has taken the shape of a strategy of self-victimization (Verdery 2003, 136). According to Sorin Alexandrescu, this is rooted in the “victim complex” that characterizes Romanian elites (Alexandrescu 1998, 65). In this view, Romanians have seen themselves as the victims of history and geography, of their own leaders, of neighboring powers, and so on. After 1989, the conspiracy theories that purported to unveil the truth about the former regime made use of yet another trope in addition to self-victimization: generalized, national guilt, stemming from Romanians’ active or passive complicity with the communist regime.

Immediately after the fall of communism, the Romanian elites competing for control of the public sphere made heavy use of the idea of an anti-Romanian conspiracy. The self-styled democrats emphasized victimization,² whereas the “neo-communists” played the card of generalized guilt.³ A decade later, both perspectives were merged in order to provide an all-encompassing explanation for the communist period, a time when Romanians were both victims and perpetrators.

The philosopher Gabriel Liiceanu was the first public intellectual who put victimization at the center of his discourse on the communist regime.⁴ In a celebrated essay, he depicted communism as “an alien invasion”: “Inasmuch as it was not rooted in history, but ushered in something that had never before existed on earth, communism appears to have fallen upon mankind like an alien civilization that suppresses with one swift blow our entire history, throwing us all in the confusion of a never-ending nightmare” (Liiceanu 2005, 42).⁵ For Liiceanu, communism was a “terrible malady... like the syphilis that infiltrates the body under the promise of carnal pleasure or the poison hiding inside a ripe apple”

² The democrats are categorized here with the political Right, including members of the interwar political parties, former political detainees, and opponents of the communist regime.

³ The neo-communists are the elites drawn from the ranks of the old communist structures.

⁴ Gabriel Liiceanu was a dissident during the communist period and became an influential public intellectual and opinion leader after the regime’s collapse.

⁵ The paragraphs are translated from Romanian. The article, titled “On Heaven and Hell on Earth,” was first published in *Revista 22*, January 10–17, 1992.

(Liiceanu 2005, 35). Around the same time, a leading Romanian historian characterized communism as a foreign occupation by “the assassins of the Romanian nation” (Papacostea 1992).

At the center of the victimization myth is the idea that Romanians were betrayed by the Allied powers during the Yalta peace talks at the end of World War II. In other words, communism was made possible by the betrayal of the West. Romania’s destiny was sealed by the scrap of paper on which Churchill and Stalin divided the Western and Soviet spheres of influence at the Fourth Moscow Conference.

The myth of the “Yalta betrayal” took shape in several stages. It started in the Romanian diaspora in the West,⁶ with Nicolae Baciú (1983), Iosif Constantin Drăgan (1986), and a series of Romanian magazines and journals published in Western Europe.⁷ After the fall of communism, the “Yalta betrayal” was popularized in Romania through translations and historical works (some older,⁸ others more recent [Drăgan 1993; Georgescu 1993]). Even the Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance in Sighet has dedicated a thematic room to this episode (Dobre 2007a, 183). As a building block of Romanian self-victimization, the myth of the Yalta betrayal that ushered in communism persists in Romanian society, particularly in Internet discussion forums.⁹

Part of the victimization myth is the figure of the tyrannical ruler who has turned against his own people. At one time or another, many historical figures were accused of having led Romania to ruin. Thus the crimes and persecutions perpetrated by the communist regime in the 1950s were blamed by Ceaușescu on his predecessor, Gheorghiu-Dej, and his clique. In turn, Ceaușescu himself was turned after his death into “a Machiavellian ruler bewitched by a Danubian Lady Macbeth”—a reference to Ceaușescu’s wife, widely believed to have exercised a sinister influence on him (Karnoouh 1991, 7).

The victimization myth was built around real historical events. Romania did go through a foreign occupation, with the Red Army con-

⁶ Conte (1965) was among the first to discuss the Yalta betrayal.

⁷ *Europa și neamul românesc* [Europe and the Romanian People] was published in Rome, *Stindardul* [The Standard] in Munich, and so on.

⁸ Baciú (1983) was reprinted in 1990.

⁹ This myth is still present in Romanian society despite Lucian Boia’s debunking efforts (1997, 208).

trolling the country from 1944 to 1958, the regime's persecutions were constant, and in the first decade were especially harsh, physically annihilating the interwar elites. Where the myth comes in is in identifying communism solely with its repressive policies and in dividing Romanian society into victims and perpetrators.

The post-1989 myth-making process regarding the communist era is best exemplified by a celebrated documentary series, *The Memorial of Sorrow*, produced by Romanian state television.¹⁰ From the first episodes, the series clearly portrays the history of communism from a simple, Manichean perspective as a confrontation between the forces of good and evil (Dobre 2014, 95). The title of the second episode, "The Perpetrators and Victims of Torture," encapsulates the ethos of the whole documentary. Through more than 150 episodes, the victimization myth is developed visually, the perfect illustration that postmodern political myths are shaped and widely disseminated through mass media.

The Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance in Sighet was arguably the main driving force behind the myth of collective victimization. The brainchild of poet and dissident Ana Blandiana, the memorial includes a museum at the former prison for political detainees at Sighetul Marmăției as well as an international center for the study of communism and, in co-operation with the Civic Academy Foundation, has helped perpetuate the view of the Romanian nation as a victim of history.

By providing facile explanations for the rise of the communist regime and its preservation in power for more than four decades, the victimization myth (and its "collective guilt" counterpart) in effect exonerates Romanians of all responsibility for the regime. Although it originated with the political Right, the myth achieved consensus because the neo-communists had little interest in opening debates on individual responsibility for the regime's self-preservation. The neo-communist rhetoric states clearly that all Romanians were victims of the nation's historical destiny. The rise and fall of communism were dictated by the natural

¹⁰ Initially the documentary aired in prime time; it was subsequently moved to a later hour but still enjoyed a wide audience. The last episode was shown in 2001; since 2007 the documentary has been available on DVD; some of its interviews were also published in the volume *Memorialul durerii. O istorie care nu se învață la școală* [The memorial of sorrow: A history not taught in school] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007).

course of history. Thus Ion Iliescu, a dissident communist leader of the 1980s and Romania's first president after the fall of the regime, has stated that communism was "condemned by history" and should simply be forgotten.

And so the culprit for forty-four years of communism was finally found: history. Few were prepared to answer writer Octavian Paler's appeal to all citizens to scrutinize their conscience for their conduct during communism.¹¹ Only a handful of members of the Social Dialogue Group supported Paler's proposal.¹² Most intellectuals tacitly agreed with Eugen Simion, at the time the president of the Romanian Academy of Sciences, who made it clear that he did not feel responsible for the regime's crimes and abuses.

Thus for the neo-communists, the myth of collective guilt went hand in hand with the victimization myth. From this perspective, Romanians were at once victims of the historical forces that brought communism to power and complicit in the perpetuation of the regime. In the early 1990s, when former political detainees demanded a public condemnation of communism, the neo-communist authorities flatly refused, arguing that the large numbers of former party members and collaborators of the secret police (*Securitate*) made such a condemnation impractical (Pasti 1995, 242). Constantin Ticu Dumitrescu, the president of the Former Political Prisoners' Association between 1990 and 2008, has noted that the neo-communists "circulated the myth of the black-spotted Dalmatian as a symbol of sin and collective guilt, in the sense that everyone was equally guilty. This would have rendered the regime's crimes anonymous and accidental" (Dumitrescu 1991, 4).

The former detainees fought against victimization and collective guilt. Most of them did not think of themselves as victims. They demanded that the true perpetrators of the regime's crimes be brought to justice. Thousands of pieces of evidence were collected in anticipation of criminal proceedings. Nevertheless, such efforts proved largely futile, even if President Traian Băsescu's 2006 condemnation of the communist

¹¹ Paler was a dissident writer of the 1980s.

¹² The group (GDS) is a non-governmental organization founded on December 31, 1989, to support reflection on communist and post-communist society and to defend human rights and the rule of law.

regime as “illegitimate and criminal” ought to have paved the way for legal proceedings.¹³

On April 5, 2006, President Bănescu¹⁴ instituted a presidential commission aimed at “studying the communist dictatorship in Romania.” The commission, directed by the well-known researcher of communism Vladimir Tismăneanu, produced an impressive report of more than 600 pages on crimes and abuses perpetrated by communists in Romania from 1945 to 1989. The conclusions of the report were presented to the Romanian Parliament by the president on December 18, 2006.¹⁵ Based on these conclusions, the president proclaimed communism to be “criminal and illegitimate,” stating that the Romanian people were a victim of history and geopolitics: “The conclusions of the Commission, which I embrace, state that the totalitarian regime was imposed from abroad by force... imported from the Soviet Union, communist ideology provided justifications for the assault on civil society and political and economic freedom, for the annihilation of democratic parties, the destruction of the free market, the extermination through assassination, deportation, forced labor, and imprisonment of hundreds of thousands of people.... In condemning Romania’s communist regime, I express my admiration for the heroic opposition to the dictatorship, from the resistance fighters in the mountains to the activists of the political parties targeted by communists to the dissidents of the Ceaușescu period.... At the same time, I express my compassion for the suffering endured by the overwhelming majority of Romanians.”¹⁶

The president’s remarks on the nation’s tragic destiny—specifically the imposition of communism onto Romanians from abroad, by the Soviets—lend the victimization theory the aura of national myth. For the

¹³ The first steps in this direction, in 2009, were modest. Moreover, in 2010 the compensation for former political prisoners was limited to 10,000 euros per individual. Criminal proceedings for torture, murder, and other such crimes were opened against the agents of the regime’s repressive apparatus in 2013.

¹⁴ He acknowledged that his inspiration for creating this commission was Resolution 1481 of the Council of Europe adopted in January 2006, a resolution that condemned communist regimes’ abuses.

¹⁵ Although initially the Commission as well as the president’s discourse faced opposition from those nostalgic for communism, lately the Commission report has become part of the mainstream discourse on communism.

¹⁶ Speech available at http://www.presidency.ro/?_RID=det&tb=date&id=8288&PRID=search (accessed November 27, 2013).

post-communist political Right, this was in fact a foundation myth, and its new official status was reaffirmed by its dissemination through high school textbooks (the history of communism is a special optional subject in many high schools). Moreover, the president's discourse also reveals echoes of another myth, quite fashionable after 1989: the myth of anti-communist resistance, itself part of the broader myth of the Golden Age.

The myth of the Golden Age

The myth of the Golden Age as it developed in the post-communist period has two closely related strands: the flourishing interwar period and the anticommunist resistance. Both tropes describe a Romanian society animated by lofty ideals completely opposed to those of communism. The myth sought to offer a social model to replace communism, yet the interwar "Romania felix" myth was also a means of lending political legitimacy to the post-communist democratic elites. This was achieved by turning the spotlight on the remarkable series of interwar cultural achievements while completely ignoring the social and economic disparities that plagued interwar Romania.¹⁷

At the end of World War I, Romania expanded its territory and population and gained international recognition; with this came the drive of the younger elites to change things. A new generation of artists and intellectuals of undeniable talent came of age in the 1920s—writers and artists like Tristan Tzara, Victor Brauner, Constantin Brâncuși, Marcel Janco, and M. H. Maxy. The leader of the "1927 generation" was Mircea Eliade, accompanied by Eugène Ionesco and Emil Cioran, Constantin Noica,¹⁸

¹⁷ In 1930 the population of Romania was 18,052,896 people, of which 3,632,178 were in urban areas and 14,420,718 in rural areas. Literacy was limited to 57 percent of the population (69.2 percent male and 45.5 percent female). Only 1.6 percent of the population had studied at a higher learning institution; 85.1 percent received only primary schooling (*Enciclopedia României* 1940, 1: 133–160). In 1930–1935, 18.6 percent of the population owned less than one hectare of land, 33.6 percent owned between three and five hectares, and 22.8 percent owned between five and ten hectares. See Bogdan Murgescu (2010, 229). Poverty and illiteracy were particularly dramatic among the peasantry.

¹⁸ A philosopher and writer persecuted and imprisoned under communism for his involvement with the interwar fascist movement. Released from prison in 1964, he founded the informal but influential philosophical School of Păltiniș.

Mircea Vulcănescu,¹⁹ and Nicolae Steinhardt,²⁰ to name but a few. Yet these intellectual achievements should not blind us to the widespread socioeconomic inequality of the era, which arguably set the stage for the rise of communism.

To be fair, the myth-making process concerning the interwar intellectual golden age had been initiated by the protagonists themselves during the 1930s. After World War II, these ideas circulated mostly in the West but reached Romania during the ideological détente of the 1960s. Romanian writers of the period looked to their interwar predecessors as models of literary excellence (Negrici 2006, 237). Later, in the 1980s, the “golden age of Romanian culture” was once again marginalized, lest it offer an alternative to what was then hailed as “the Ceaușescu golden age.” Only after the fall of communism was the interwar period restored to its earlier relevance.

Since the post-communist discourse on interwar Romania focused almost exclusively on its cultural, technical, artistic, and political achievements,²¹ it is worth pointing out that interwar society was not nearly as democratic as in the fond recollections of the former political prisoners, many of them affiliated with the interwar political parties. Economically, Romania’s strong oil industry was counterbalanced by agricultural underdevelopment. Similarly, the improved living standards in the urban areas did not extend much beyond the city center. Bucharest, known informally as “little Paris,” is a case in point.²²

¹⁹ A philosopher, economist, and writer, Vulcănescu served as undersecretary of state in the Ministry of Finance during the war and died in a communist prison in 1952 from torture and exposure.

²⁰ A Romanian Jewish writer and translator, Nicolae Steinhardt (1912–1989) converted to Orthodox Christianity while serving his sentence in a communist prison. He recalled his spiritual experiences during imprisonment in *Jurnalul fericirii* [The diary of happiness]. Confiscated by the communist authorities and finally published in Romania after 1989, the book brought him nationwide fame.

²¹ In the last decade this discourse has also become visible on the Internet. For example, one website describes interwar Romania as a “diverse and harmonious society with an impressive agricultural output and a nascent, but healthy industry”: <http://romaniainterbelica.memoria.ro/> (accessed January 2014).

²² Contrast this with the idealized perspective on the living conditions of the interwar working class voiced by, for instance, Adrian Vasilescu, an adviser to the governor of Romania’s national bank and an opinion leader: <http://economie.hotnews.ro/stiri-companii-15321400-adrian-vasilescu-rfi-perioada-interbelica-ceferistii-aveau-casa-pri-maverii-vedea-cfr-marfa-stat-conducere-puternica.htm> (accessed December 20, 2013).

The debunking of the myth of the interwar golden age began with the reassessment of the intellectual generation of the 1920s, but it failed to reach much further than that. A debate arose during the decade 2000–2009, after Mihail Sebastian's diary was published in the United States. In it the author, himself a leading interwar intellectual, denounced the anti-Semitism of the 1930s. According to Norman Manea, this debate had a cathartic role in a culture still marked by national communism, where any critique of nationalism was perceived as unpatriotic (Manea 1998, 40).

According to Vladimir Tismăneanu and Dan Pavel, these debates can be read as symptoms of the difficult transition to a society based on the rule of law and democratic procedures (Tismăneanu and Pavel 1994, 409). Irina Livezeanu has even called this a "cultural war," in which the democratic and neo-communist elites fought for the heart of the new generation of intellectuals, a generation that they both tried to win over in order to perpetuate their "cultural monopoly" (Livezeanu 2004, 12–13).

Often interwar intellectuals' nationalism went hand-in-hand with their openly affirmed anticommunist ethos, which after 1945 earned them persecution, prison sentences, and even death. After 1989, the anti-communist legacy of the interwar intellectuals was taken up in the public sphere—not least by the neo-communists, who realized the public appeal of the anticommunist position and attempted to play this card in their own way. One can thus speak, on the one hand, of the "anti-Ceaușescu" discourse embraced by the former members of the communist apparatus, eager to turn the dictator into their scapegoat, and on the other hand, of the anticommunism advocated by the former political detainees and some dissidents.

The anticommunist myth was built on the historical fact of the resistance movement of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Based in mountainous, heavily forested regions and initially encouraged by the United States, this movement lacked a unified command and did not enlist among its combatants a large part of the population. Rather, it was a reaction of isolated partisan groups to the regime's persecutions—around 10,000 people in all (Consiliul Național 2003), united in their hope of an American intervention in Eastern Europe. The number of those who became involved in the resistance movement was much greater, but many of them were implicated almost unawares; their status as anticommunist fighters is justified only by their subsequent prosecution on trumped-up charges of aiding the partisans. For example, elderly women who gave a thirsty stranger a drink of

water were tortured by the communist authorities and convicted of such political crimes as “agitation against the [communist] public order.”²³

After 1989, the “armed anticommunist resistance” became the centerpiece of anticommunist myth-making, as part of a discursive strategy aimed at addressing the common perception that, unlike other Eastern European nations known for their anticommunist liberation movements, Romanians had passively accepted communism (Gheorghiu 2001, 169). The irony is that this anticommunist discourse played into the nationalist rhetoric promoted by Ceaușescu’s regime and harkened back to the older Romanian myths, such as the forest outlaw who helps the poor, and the peasant as the national archetype (Dobre 2006).

Books, exhibitions, documentaries, and even a motion picture disseminated this myth.²⁴ In the end, it was Elisabeta Rizea of Nucșoara who arguably became the face of the anticommunist armed resistance. A peasant woman, Rizea stayed loyal to her husband, who had joined the partisans in the mountains, and thus herself became the victim of fierce repression. She was tortured and sentenced to twenty-five years of forced labor; her persecution continued even after she was released from prison in 1964, following the general amnesty. After 1989, Rizea was the main hero of the *Memorial of Sorrow* and the symbol of the resistance movement.²⁵ Upon her death in 2003, she entered the national anticommunist pantheon.

Notwithstanding the real elements around which the public image of the armed resistance was built, the total figure of the combatants is grossly exaggerated, for instance by swelling the partisans’ ranks with every political prisoner or victim of deportation—thus all political detainees have been issued certificates naming them “resistance fighters.” The massive

²³ Testimony given by Madame C. (my informants chose to stay anonymous) during my PhD research on women who were former political detainees and their memory of communism and political persecutions (Dobre 2007b).

²⁴ These include the memoirs of the anticommunist fighters as well as dozens of volumes of archival documents. The motion picture, which received substantial media attention, is titled *Portretul luptătorului la tinerețe* [The portrait of the fighter as a young man] and is intended as the first part of a trilogy dedicated to the resistance movement.

²⁵ A public subscription was opened to build a monument to Elisabeta Rizea to replace Lenin’s statue, dismantled in the 1990s. In a 2006 poll on state television, she ranked fifty-eighth among the “greatest Romanians of all time.”

presence of the interwar fascists of the Iron Guard in the resistance movement has been largely ignored.²⁶ Instead, great emphasis was placed on the military background of the partisans, such as the former army officers from Arnăuțoiu's partisan group, who have also been presented as symbols of the movement.

A new political mythology: The Romanian "Revolution"

In its final years, Ceaușescu's regime turned nationalism into a secular religion and preserved only a vague resemblance to the principles of 1950s international communism. After 1989, while the communist rhetoric was abandoned by practically everyone, the nationalist spirit remained alive. It was wedded to a new, "democratic" rhetoric and to a foundation myth aimed at lending public support and legitimacy to the new political order.

In their address to the nation on December 29, 1989, the leaders of the then recently formed National Salvation Front (Frontul Salvării Naționale, FSN) proclaimed, in the tradition of communist ideology, the December 15–25, 1989, rising as the "Revolution of National Reconciliation" (*Adevărul*, December 29, 1989, 1). They called for unity and fraternity, emphasizing the necessity of rebuilding a country wrecked by Ceaușescu's regime. To appeal to Romanians' national pride and lend credibility to their new regime, the neo-communists hailed the Romanian Revolution as "the first revolution broadcast live on television." During those days, Romanians were presented with an idealized image of their country, centered on "martyr cities" like Timișoara or Bucharest. Moreover, those eager to take part in the fight against the remnants of the Ceaușescu dictatorship could, in principle, still find the opportunity at the end of December 1989.

In time, the December revolution became a centerpiece of the neo-communist political discourse; the preamble of Law No. 341 of July 2004 described it as a popular revolt that spread from Timișoara to several other cities, morphed into an anti-totalitarian revolution, and with the support of the army, overthrew the regime and brought in democracy

²⁶ The Guard's interwar leader, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu (d. 1938), made clear his anticommunist strategy as early as 1920 in *Despre legionari* [On the Legionaries].

and thus a new era of Romanian history.²⁷ Memorial policies were developed to keep the revolution alive in the public consciousness through monuments, commemorations, and legislation benefiting the December 1989 heroes. These were divided into two categories by Law No. 49 of December 1990: “martyr heroes” and “revolutionaries.” The latter were granted numerous privileges, such as stipends, free public transportation, free tuition, housing, land grants, and preferences for public sector jobs.

The next step in memorializing the revolution took a little longer, but in 2002, December 22 was proclaimed by law the day for commemorating “Romania’s freedom.” December 22 has now all the distinctive marks of an official state holiday, with solemn processions, memorial services, the flag flown at half mast, and so on.

Law No. 341 of July 2004 replaced the 1990 legislation and redefined the categories of participants in the revolution and their entitlements.²⁸ The “martyr heroes” were those who died in the fighting; the “wounded fighter” category is self-explanatory; the “detained fighter” referred to those arrested by the repressive forces in December 1989. A new class of “revolution hero,” “distinguished by extraordinary deeds,” was created to reward anyone who mobilized and led large groups of people, raised barricades, or occupied vital points. Finally, there was the honorary title of “participant in the victory of the Romanian Revolution.” A special government department was created to address the needs of the revolutionaries.

In addition to the cemetery dedicated to the martyrs of the revolution, a monument titled *Memorial of Rebirth* was dedicated to the revolutionaries at the initiative of President Iliescu, who chose the winning design himself. Unveiled in 2005, the monument by sculptor Alexandru Ghilduș generated considerable controversy for both its underlying message and its artistic form. Shaped like a spike or pale, the monument prompted associations with impalement, the execution method of the medieval Romanian prince Vlad the Impaler/Dracula. Former Radio Free Europe journalist Neculai Munteanu saw it as Iliescu’s way of “poking” the

²⁷ Law No. 341 of July 2004, <http://www.legex.ro/Legea-341-2004-43778.aspx> (last accessed December 20, 2013).

²⁸ In December 2008 this legislation was extended to include the participants in the anticommunist protests in Brașov in November 1987.

Romanians one last time before stepping down as president.²⁹ There was also criticism of the monument's excessive cost.

In 2004 the neo-communists then in power also created a research institute, the Institute of the Romanian Revolution of 1989 (*Institutul Revoluției române din decembrie 1989*). The institute's national board of trustees was appointed by the then-president of Romania, Ion Iliescu. After Iliescu's presidency ended, the board promptly returned the favor and elected him its chairman. The activities and public funding of the institute generated some controversy. In particular, the decision of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2006 to integrate the institute into a projected memorial center known as the "Museum of Communism" sparked new debates between the neo-communists, who turned the revolution into the symbol of the new political order, and the democrats, who depicted it as the final act of the communist regime.

The myth of the 1989 revolution also includes elements of conspiracy theory, such as the idea of a false "revolution" orchestrated by foreign powers or "taken over" by the members of the communist apparatus. These ideas began to circulate shortly after December 1989 and, since 2010, have also been present on Internet sites and in the blogosphere.³⁰

Conclusion

Relying heavily on images as well as on narratives, postmodern political myths play the same old role—they simplify the complexity of the world in order to create an interpretation apt to draw a large consensus. The myths analyzed in this study tell us more about the social imaginary of post-communist Romania than about the reality of the interwar period and the communist regime. Built around real, historical facts, the discourse on the communist regime more often than not ends up in myth-making, as its true aim is social mobilization, not nuanced understanding.

²⁹ See Hotnews.ro, October 7, 2006. http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-arhiva-1151228-protestele-adresa-tepei-lui-ghildus-transforma-vandalism.htm?p_64025 (last accessed December 19, 2016.) Munteanu played on the slang meaning of "pale" in Romanian: fraud or swindle.

³⁰ After 2010, Romanians became more interested in social media and Internet consumption; therefore, the conspiracy myth, as well as other myths, spread on the Web.

It has been observed that myths prove particularly appealing during “crisis” periods (Girardet 1997, 141). The fall of communism fits this description, because it plunged Romanian society into a state of “post-totalitarian depression,” to use Tzvetan Todorov’s term (Todorov 1999, 67). After a long and traumatic exposure to the ideology and social engineering of the communist regime, Romanian society faced an identity crisis. Thus it is little wonder that it turned to myth-making to mend social bonds.

As the mobilizing force of myth can help restructure society and build new social identities (Girardet 1997, 142–143), one cannot emphasize enough the political importance of the myth of the Romanian Revolution of 1989. The revolution was the “ground zero” of post-communist political society. Similarly, the victimization discourse played its part in cementing a shared national identity. Mirroring the fragmented post-communist society, various myths were circulated and sometimes merged, as in the case of the myths of anticommunism and the interwar golden age, on which the post-1989 democratic elites built their political legitimization.

Since the post-communist period was a time of soul-searching, the myths reviewed here should also be understood as part of the process of self-understanding on which all plans for a better future are based. Since the task of dealing with the communist past proved difficult, many Romanians were led to believe that by identifying with a specific social group, such as the anticommunists, the revolutionaries, or the democrats, they might find it easier to come to terms with the previous forty-four years of their history. In this context, simple, clear-cut explanations rooted in myth-making stood the best chance of making (some) sense of an absurd and repressive regime and giving significance to a new political order.

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Liliana Deyanova

Post-Communist Politics of Memory and the New Regime of Historiography

Recent Controversies on the Memory of the “Forty-Five Years of the Communist Yoke” and the “Myth of Batak”

This text starts from a *mytheme*,¹ “Bulgaria under the yoke,”² brought into the spotlight on the occasion of two events, in 2006 and 2007. Both cases are about historical memory and the debates on memorial laws, legislation on the memory of historical events similar to the laws against Holocaust denial.

The first case concerns the memory of the five centuries of Ottoman rule in Bulgaria, and the second involves the forty-five years of the communist “yoke.” This mytheme, however, is just an occasion for raising larger questions about the autonomy of historical research today. How can historians facing the imperative of de-nationalizing history³ after the col-

¹ “Mytheme” is used here in the sense of Claude Lévi-Strauss’s structural analysis of myths as the smallest possible unit of meaning within a myth (as the phoneme is within the language system). See Lévi-Strauss (1958, 227–255).

² The “under the yoke” mytheme has a stable place in Bulgarians’ worldview. In the communist textbooks, the “yokes” were Turkish and fascist. An important national novel, published in 1894 by Ivan Vazov, known as “the ideologue of the nation,” is titled *Under the Yoke*; its subtitle is *The Life of Bulgarians on the Eve of the Liberation*. In 2009, this novel ranked first on the list of most widely read and loved books in Bulgaria.

³ In the sense of the critique of the national optic in the “post-national constellation” by Ulrich Beck and Jürgen Habermas: see Beck (2005), chapters 1 and 2; and Habermas (2000). These views do not make obsolete the problems of the revival of old nationalisms after 1989 and the new forms of nationalism as discussed by, for instance Brubaker (1996).

lapse of the official mythology of the party-state resist political pressure by different groups, each advocating their own sectarian version of the past? (Beck 2005).

In this chapter, I seek to describe the two cases, in which I read the symptoms of a new regime governing both historical writing and the status of the historian as a specialist. The fashionable concept of the “politics of memory” is another symptom of this regime. The first case is about the scandal surrounding a “sacred place of memory,” Batak, the site of the massacre perpetrated by Ottoman irregular troops in April 1876, during the Bulgarian uprising. This was a highly consequential event, as the international response was enormous and contributed to the outbreak of another war between Russia (aided by its allies) and the Ottoman Empire, leading to the liberation of Bulgaria from “the five-century-long Turkish yoke.” In 2007, the Batak massacre, which claimed several thousand lives, was dubbed “the Bulgarian Holocaust.” The 2007 controversy was provoked by the project “The Memory of (Batak)” Baleva and Brunbauer 2007; Vezekov 2009).

The project sought to generate reflection on the ways in which the collective memory of the Batak massacre is constructed: for example, to discuss the role of the visualization of the event (such as the famous painting by the Polish artist Antoni Piotrowski) as well as of the poetry dedicated to Batak by the canonical author Ivan Vazov. One of the versions of the project’s title, containing the phrase “the myth of Batak,” sparked the heated reaction of both nationalist factions and influential historians. What followed was a ban on the project-related exhibition and on the conference scheduled to take place in an institute of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Petitions supporting the continuation of the project and assessing its relevance (one of the petitions for it was initiated by historians close to the Center for Advanced Study⁴), as well as petitions against this project, were launched in the public space. Many participants in the debate, including historians, believed that “a few for-

⁴ The Center for Advanced Study Sofia is an independent Bulgaria-based research center “with strong international and interdisciplinary orientation which sustains academic independence and freedom of research, scholarly excellence, and intellectual creativity, affiliated to the internationally renowned group of ‘Institutes for Advanced Study’ in the US and Europe.” See more at <http://www.cas.bg/en>.

eigners and venal Bulgarians paid by foreign foundations” wanted to desacralize Batak. The ultra-nationalists insisted on the immediate passing of a “memory law on the Bulgarian Holocaust.”⁵ Bulgaria’s president, a historian by education, even paid a visit to Batak. In his speech, he defended “our Batak,” that of Bulgarian citizens who had been “citizens of Europe ever since the ninth century AD.”

The second debated case is the adoption of an international resolution about the memory of communism, the Bulgarian lobbying in support of it, and the resistance to it. The resolution was regarded as the culmination of various local and international efforts to officially condemn communism.⁶ This type of officialization of the memory of communism raised a few questions that I will try to answer below.

Since 1989, several attempts have been made in Bulgaria to draft legislation regarding the communist regime. On March 30, 2000, the Bulgarian Parliament debated and then passed the Act Declaring the Criminal Nature of the Communist Regime in Bulgaria. Bulgarian anti-communist groups had been crucial advocates not only for the adoption of the Bulgarian act but also for the adoption by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, in January 2006, of Resolution 1481 on the Need for International Condemnation of the Crimes of Totalitarian Communist Regimes.

In 2006, Lachezar Toshev, a Bulgarian MP of the Union of Democratic Forces and, at the time, deputy president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, organized a conference in Paris at which Stéphane Courtois, the internationally acclaimed historian of communism, was the guest of honor. Courtois also took part in a conference in Brussels later in the year, at which was discussed the creation of an institute for the “unification of the memory of communism on a scientific basis.” The framework for interpreting communism was the “totalitarian paradigm.” According to Courtois, the recently opened archives of the communist regimes prove that this paradigm is correct and invalidate the

⁵ A little later, the Church canonized the martyrs—“more than 2,000”—of Batak. Various sources put the number of victims at 1,800, 4,000, or 5,000 (including many women, children, and old people).

⁶ I have described elsewhere the events leading up to this resolution (Deyanova 2008).

theses of historians of the revisionist school.⁷ There, in a nutshell, is the idea of “Bulgaria under the communist yoke.” That expression was actually used as the title of the section on Bulgaria of *The Black Book of Communism*, re-edited by Courtois in 2002.

When I interviewed Professor Lioubomir Ognyanov, one of the three authors of the Bulgaria chapter of the *Black Book*, he expressed surprise at the way the text he had provided for the volume had been edited and merged indiscriminately with two other texts, by Diniou Sharlanov and Plamen Tzvetkov, without his knowledge. The co-authored text that emerged contained generalizations and additions that Professor Ognyanov did not agree with. And he certainly rejected the title given to “his” article, “Bulgaria under the Communist Yoke.”

The Myth of Batak⁸

The project “Batak as a Place of Bulgarian Memory” is another stage in the struggle for national places of memory, unfolding in the context of the “opening” of post-communist society and of critiques of the traditional “grand narrative” of the nation, which have caused visible tensions within the historians’ community, implicating both Bulgarian and European scholars.⁹ The debates on “the denationalization of history”

⁷ For a critique of the “totalitarian paradigm” that was influential during the Cold War, see Fitzpatrick (2007). The totalitarian *telos* of new Slovene historiography is analyzed in Močnik (2008) and Močnik (2009). See also Damamme and Lavabre (2000).

⁸ A project supported by the Institute for East European Studies at Free University of Berlin and conducted by researcher Ulf Brunnbauer and his Bulgarian associate Martina Baleva, called “Batak as a Place of Bulgarian Memory,” stirred controversy. The two researchers, who analyzed a picture of the Batak massacre, qualified the Batak atrocities as myth. Historians, politicians, and other public actors, as well as citizens of Batak, overreacted to the report assessments as presented by the media.

⁹ I have developed elsewhere a thesis that I find useful to summarize here, namely that communist (i.e., pre-1989) history textbooks were greatly indebted to the historiographical mood of the period before 1944. The transformation of history textbooks in the years after 1944—i.e., with the advent of communist regimes to Eastern Europe—was not radical; the “internationalist meta-narrative” and the spirit of internationalism are not dominant themes in the textbooks. Of course, the textbooks are permeated by the glorification of the masses and by descriptions of the treasons of

are increasing, while various projects about how to achieve it are elaborated. Significantly, during the Batak controversy, in the spring of 2007, a conference was scheduled, under the patronage of the president of Bulgaria, to discuss the first joint French-German history textbook and its larger implications for writing European history. The textbook marked the repudiation of the rigid convictions of national educators such as Ernest Lavisse (the author of one of the first history textbooks, which Pierre Nora has called “the gospel of the little French citizens”), particularly of the thesis that “our ancestors are ourselves in the past and our heirs are ourselves in the future.” The time had come for the end of this traditional paradigm and its emphasis on the monolithic nation-state history and its heroes. (In its ideal form, this paradigm represents the people, the state, and their heroes as a “trinity,” the contact with the other as a military clash, and neighboring peoples as wrongdoers [Panayotova 2005]).

Among the many statements made during the Batak debate, two of them illustrate, in a logically pure form, the two extreme responses to the transformations of our historical knowledge. On the one hand, there was the idea that history needed to be denationalized like the Bulgarian Telecommunications Company, possibly with the participation of international strategic partners. On the other hand, authoritative historians like the director

the national—“chauvinist”—bourgeoisie and of the forces of imperialism. The entire course of human history is interpreted in the new historical-materialist tone and is marked by Marxist teleology, such as the theme of the liberation of the working class. But this does not yet mean the triumph of internationalism. The historiographical production post-1944 (as well as post-1989) is part of the more general paradigm and wider national “historical culture” (or, more precisely, national mentality) of the pre-ideological *longue durée* perspective on the development of the nation. In this respect—if in no other—historiographical works after 1944 kept the emphasis on Bulgarian “national” history that had defined interwar bourgeois historiography. This is evident in the pride of place given to the nineteenth-century revival of Bulgaria’s “glorious past” and the emphasis on such topics as the tearing apart of the “nation’s body” by the Berlin Peace Treaty of 1878, the abduction of its “children,” and the Great Powers’ self-interested disrespect for Bulgaria’s “natural borders.” The themes of national territory and land, Bulgarian belonging and blood sacrifice, Bulgarian nativism, and endangered Bulgarian heritage define this historiographical discourse. National identity, including the modern civic identity, is reduced to ethnicity; people of non-Bulgarian origin are excluded from the body of the nation. For example, “in Bulgaria citizens of Turkish origin are not Bulgarians.” This paradigm has stirred strong feelings that later were easily used for political purposes.

of the Institute of History, Georgi Markov, argued during the debate on Batak that “globalization thinks that history stands in its way” and that “globalization will prohibit history” because “everything is for sale.”

In the following paragraphs, I will try to explain the diverse reactions to the project “Batak as a Place of Bulgarian Memory” and to answer a series of related questions, such as: how are national places of memory conceived of in the new, post-national age? What does “the denationalization of history” actually mean? Where exactly are the cultural fault-lines—are the differences in attitudes towards history generational? Or are they determined by political and institutional affiliation, social capital, education, or other social factors?

The questions raised by the demythologization of Batak are not only local; there are not merely the symptoms of the Balkans’ post-communist deficiencies with respect to “educated nationalism” and normal historiographical practices. Nor are they simply episodes in national politics in which the fears of the anti-European or superficially Europeanized elites were expressed. The case of Batak shows the transformation of the role of national symbols and the growing inability of national educators to propose national and state representations that are more than mere myths. The logic of a new type of state nationalism can also be discerned here, with populist and efficient messages.

This is a more global phenomenon: France created a Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity, and Co-Development, while the defenders of Québec’s sovereignty, worried by the declining interest in national history (for which they blamed “foreign intoxication”), proposed a new curriculum of national history. Everywhere there are debates on open borders, de-territorialization, separation of citizenship and nationality, the paralysis of “representative democracy,” and the vacuum of meaning and collective identities during times of insecurity and media-driven populism (Jewsiewicki and Létourneau 2003). It is clear that the old nation-state and its institutions are in crisis. It is therefore understandable that there should also be a crisis of the national official historiography, for its emancipation as an autonomous field was connected precisely to the birth of the nation and to the grand narrative of its progress.

But the political and academic elites that were formed within the “container of the nation-state” are only dimly aware of the current post-national cultural changes (Beck 2005). Nationalism has ceased to be “the second nature of citizenship,” as Habermas puts it. The national perspec-

tive no longer provides an adequate framework for grasping the new forms of “living together.” It cannot explain why populist language is the logical response to the crisis of meaning in today’s global, “risk society” (Beck 1992, 9) and why nowadays this language seems to be the only possible option for the symbolic representation of the national political community. The neo-populist reactions in different countries are the “reaction to the radical absence of perspectives in a world whose limits and fundamentals have been shaken” (Beck 2005, 7). According to Ulrich Beck, populism may turn out to be a real challenge and even a “shock therapy” for democracy. Populism is the symptom not of absent statehood but of impossible statehood, of a statehood that, faced with the crisis of people’s sovereignty, can no longer exist in the old way. Populist language is one of the few possible languages at a time when adequate symbolizations of the common civic project are in short supply. At such a time, the past becomes the chief resource for the self-definition of the community. But globalization as a process where “the national is no longer national”—and the international is no longer international—presupposes a new type of politics and a new way of thinking about the commonweal. Therefore, one must redefine the communitarian “we.” It cannot be otherwise when financial flows, deregulations, migrations, climatic changes, and the new technological revolution have all become key parts of our everyday life. Thus the nation-state ceases to be that maximally encompassing frame, the “container” in which the various institutions, groups, and professional guilds reside. Moreover, “we are so much more independent nationally the more we participate in a dense network of trans-national dependencies” (Beck 2005, 7).

Let us ask ourselves: how is public action possible today, and what symbols mobilize it? Beck argues for a new cosmopolitan memory that would emerge following the liberation of memory—and therefore of history—from the “national container.” This also means the liberation of the narrative from the emphasis on the glorious past. Cosmopolitan memory presupposes the recognition and interpenetration of different histories, and it entails a focus on the common memory of a shared history, as opposed to the separate, monological histories of culprits and victims, winners and losers (Beck 2005, 104). National modernity, in its struggle for homogeneity, seldom makes recourse to this type of dialogue. Trans-national mechanisms of conflict resolution are a step towards overcoming both the extreme technocratic position (“Batak must be denationalized like the Bulgarian Telecommunication Company”) and the

re-emergence of national mythologies (“the bones of Batak are our last stronghold against the threat of globalization”).

However, in the debate on Batak, national identity again comes out as tied to the Bulgarian land and nature, i.e., as an ahistorical explanation or, put simply, a myth.¹⁰ According to the president’s “open lesson in history,” Bulgarians have been European citizens since the ninth century, when King Boris introduced Christianity. The president’s lesson did not clearly state that Bulgarian national history is history, in the sense that Bulgarian identity is not a heritage but an ongoing project, and its places of memory are at the same time places of hope. The audience was not encouraged to understand that the Turkish version of the Batak massacre or the stories told by the Muslims from the neighboring villages are also part of “our”—Bulgarian—history, and that these stories are not things that necessarily weaken “our identity,” and that accordingly they must not be excised from the national record. The question is not “what you are” but “who you are,” not whose “bones” you have inherited but what you make of them through your own actions. In this sense, Bulgarian identity must not be “preserved” but rediscovered, again and again (Ditchev 2002).

It seems to me that commentators in both camps did not understand the deep connection between places of memory and places of hope, the fact that these two types of places constantly refer to one another. This has always been so because they are two sides of the same reality: the sacred dead heroes of the nation are connected to the meta-narrative of the progress of the nation that has inspired the nation’s builders with the advent of modernity. Otherwise, it would be strange to have a new institutional design while our nation stands intact.

In the debate on Batak, we can also sense a growing tension pitting historians, non-governmental organizations, and the new types of internationally recognized academic institutions such as the Center for Advanced Study (defined as “a center of academic excellence”) against “traditional historians” and bureaucrats from the Ministry of Education and other national institutions. The latter still possess the means to control the teaching of history, even though there are now projects for writing history textbooks in the spirit of multiculturalism and tolerance

¹⁰ Myth is precisely what “turns history into nature” (Barthes 1957).

(such projects, however, remain marginal). I will return to this tension in the second part of this chapter.

At this point, I will discuss another kind of symptom that, in my view, can be read into the 2007 Batak controversy and that testifies to a wider crisis of civil society. With the “transition from totalitarianism to democracy,” a shift in the national meta-narrative has taken place: from its fixation on national grandeur and heroism towards an emphasis on national suffering and sacrifice. In the whole media frenzy around Batak, the emphasis has been not so much on the heroism of the rebels but on the slaughtered people, the victims of the massacre. Interestingly, the nationalist leaders were not the only ones depicting Batak as a real “Bulgarian Holocaust.”

I argue that the explanation for this emphasis on the victims and their testimonies and memories has to do with the new memory politics. The victims and the excluded do not have the possibility of forceful action. They occupy a marginal position in the flow of information and the social exchanges that underlie the basic institutions of the changing world. The marginalized, however, do have one resource, although a “restricted” one (from our point of view, at least): they are the ones who have suffered. Their moral discourse is not that of agents but of passive, suffering victims. And since they cannot be efficient and successful in the major transactions, they hope for access to the global circulation of moral goods by appealing to the “retroactive justice” theorized by John Rawls. Thus politics turns into a representation of victims or, more precisely, a “competition of victims,” as Jean-Michel Chaumont showed in his study on the memory of the Holocaust (Chaumont 2000). And it is the Holocaust that now informs the “paradigm of the victim.”

It has been forgotten that memory is not religion or communication with the dead. Memory is a project. As I have mentioned above, the places of memory are necessarily also places of hope. It is therefore important to question the many “moral lobbies” that present memory as a religion (they are efficient because, in Chaumont’s words, “it is better to be a victim than a failure”).

Condemning communism

I have already mentioned that “the unification of the memory of communism on a scientific basis” was the ambition of a group of historians participating in a conference in Brussels in the aftermath of the adoption of

Resolution 1481/2006 by the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly. (No Bulgarian historian took part in this conference.) I would like to draw attention to the growing difference between remembrances of socialism and the more general, more stable “memory of communism”—in other words, between the memory of communism and the historiography of the communist regime.

I cannot trace here the different phases of the interpretations of the communist past after 1989 as well as the difficulties that historians still face in trying to give a scholarly and objective structure to the testimonies about communism that have flooded the public sphere, thereby ensuring that all the various narratives are heard. The general idea is that there ought to be an “ideal type” of historical public space in modern society, in other words, that the modern places of memory deserve the status of common places of memory even if they are not places of common memory. The risk remains, of course, that states, the European Union, or particular interest groups might impose their own symbolic monopoly over the writing of history.

As part of my research project, conducted as part of Maria Todorova and Stefan Troebst’s international project “Remembering Communism,” I interviewed twenty-six sociologists, anthropologists, cultural theorists, and historians about their memories of Bulgarian communism.¹¹ One of the first claims to a monopoly over historical knowledge was staked, one interviewee remembers, through “pressure from Moscow.” The first academic history of Bulgaria was elaborated following a model scheme, which made it easy to recreate and re-adapt (Mutafchieva et al. 1995). An interesting connection was made by another interviewee, who asked whether *The Black Book of Communism*’s chapter on Bulgaria assembled in Paris by Stephane Courtois’s team should not also be seen as a similar effort to establish a monopoly over historical memory.

Let us now return to the attempts to create laws “on memory.” On March 30, 2000, the Bulgarian Parliament debated, and one month later finally passed, with the strong support of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) and despite the socialists’ opposition, the “Act Declaring the Criminal Nature of the Communist Regime in Bulgaria.” Parliamentary com-

¹¹ See Todorova, Dimou, and Troebst 2014. I have also used in my analysis the interviews published in Mutafchieva et al. (2005–2006) and Zapryanova and Vecheva (1994).

missions also discussed various proposals for the creation of an Institute of National Memory. In the project of the historians associated with the UDF, the creation of the institute was depicted as a “democratic,” “anti-communist” initiative (after the model of the similar Polish institute that was reportedly “created to implement the decisions of the European Parliament”). In other projects, the proposed institute was designated as the Institute for the Study of Communist Crimes. The UDF proposed that half of the institute’s members be nominated by the “Union of the Victims of the Repressions” and the other half by the High Judicial Council and the National Assembly. A basic task was “the formation of proposals for history curricula that will be submitted to the Ministry of Education.”

Before the adoption of this “law on communism,” there were also a series of attempts to pass de-communization and lustration laws. A model lustration law was the “Act of Provisionally Introducing Certain Additional Qualifications for Senior Members of Scientific Institutions and the Higher Certifying Commission” of December 9, 1992. It was named the Panev Law, after the UDF MP who initiated it. An “Anti-Panev Law” was adopted a year later, blocking the effects of the Act.

On October 21, 1998, Parliament passed a “State Administration Act” that contained lustration clauses. The then-president, Petar Stoyanov, used his veto against it and returned the legislative project to Parliament for further discussion. On July 30, 1997, the National Assembly, again with substantial UDF support, passed a law on the declassification of the files of the communist-era State Security. This law was abrogated by the then-newly constituted centrist formation, the coalition National Movement Simeon II (named after Bulgaria’s last monarch). Finally, on December 6, 2006, Bulgaria passed a law on access to the State Security files. The fixation on files, on conspiracy theories, and on the “clean past” turned out to be one of the central issues in the debates on the memory of communism.

Resolution 1481 was not approved by the Bulgarian Parliament in 2006, the year of its promulgation by the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly. It was adopted only in 2009. A little later, on November 19, 2009, the Parliament also approved the European Parliament Resolution of April 2, 2009, regarding “European Conscience and Totalitarianism,” which proclaimed August 23 as “a Europe-wide Remembrance Day for the victims of all totalitarian and authoritarian regimes.”

Answering my questions about “de-communization” and “memory laws,” a few interviewees expressed optimism about the new “concen-

trated efforts of talented people” (i.e., researchers) in various “large-scale projects.” One interviewee indicated that “it is too early now to speak of a [new] historiographical canon, and it is perhaps not necessary to create one.” Others challenged the very idea of any “unified history of Europe on a scientific basis,” particularly if, for example, the “common antifascist experience” were excluded from it and antifascist resistance were ostracized (as Habermas also points out, the anti-totalitarian consensus necessarily presupposes an *a priori* “anti-antifascism”). Another interviewee argued that the past needed to be continuously rewritten and denounced any canon as “...a foolish idea, because it assumes that there exists only one reading... on the contrary, the facts may be the same but the perspectives change. This whole effort to codify into one single reading, i.e., to codify it in advance even before finding those people who will write it, is wrong, disturbing... I am not worried that we cannot boast of a textbook that would offer [a normative reading of] the memory of this period... It is hard to point to an era on which there exists a consensus of opinions, and I am not sure that this is necessarily a bad thing. It isn’t clear to me why it should be precisely communism that we must read in this way, normatively...”¹²

Many historians do not accept the specific steps of the de-communization process in Bulgaria and question the support for the legislation passed to this end. They often feel, however, that the restrictions imposed on the activity of former communist academics are justified. According to one interviewee, “it is right that there should be restrictions on their professional interference, on their impact on the current professional circles. Just as there are sanctions against Nazism, there should also be sanctions against communism in its most criminal dimensions.”

Nevertheless, in historians’ circles, substantial debates on the memory laws and the “unification of the memory of communism” are rare. Historians have not commented extensively on the Bulgarian chapter of *The Black Book of Communism*. The historical community has allowed a researcher such as Plamen Tzvetkov, one of the Bulgarian contributors to *The Black Book of Communism*, to assert his voice authoritatively in the public sphere, even if his arguments are often of the fol-

¹² During the interviews, the political underpinnings of Resolution 1481, i.e., the agenda of the European People’s Party, was also discussed.

lowing form: “from a mystical point of view, it can be said that the experts of September 9 [the communist coup of 1944] are an emanation of the forces of darkness, but from the perspective of the twenty-first century, we can simply diagnose them and say that these people suffer from a grave psychological disease.”

Respected historians have opted to stay away from the historians associated with the political parties. Furthermore, they “lack the freedom to publicly defend academic research” (Nyagulov 2010). According to some of my interviewees, there is no open debate “because it is considered inconvenient... since this means opening a war within the guild itself. And due to the dim consensus, there is somehow no debate; that is, this is considered a sensitive and human question that must have its solution outside these circles themselves.” The fragmentation of research, an increasing dependence on political and ideological “symbolic violence” and on the economic market, and a dependence on the “model scheme” trim and homogenize the ever-dimmer and more distant memories of communism.

In my analysis, one of the central questions was to what extent post-communist researchers have the autonomy and public influence needed to oppose the old and new state nationalisms and the so-called normalization of communism (Moeller 2002, 229), as well as the political formulation of historical truths. An increasingly visible lack of communication between researchers from different groups and generations has contributed to the fragmentation of research, evident in numerous historical and cultural projects. Historians increasingly lack the political channels and positions that could enable them to effectively oppose the new canonical narrative of communism and resist political pressures on the writing of academic history. We run the risk of a return to a narrative of the past that edits out the diversity of individual memories and homogenizes—in a mythological manner—the collective memory.

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Alexander Nikolov

The Phenomenon of “Parahistory” in Post-Communist Bulgaria: Old Theories and New Myths on Proto-Bulgarians

The democratic political changes of 1989 throughout Eastern Europe coincided with the beginning of a new major technological revolution, namely the rise of the Internet. These two factors helped develop a phenomenon to which one could apply the label of “parahistory.” A plethora of theories emerged with almost no concern for academic probity in scholarly research and in quasi-academic writings, easier to disseminate to the public in printed and electronic form via the new media.

These theories included the most extravagant opinions, especially in the field of history. Many publications in this field emerged from non-academic circles and were radically at odds with the widely accepted opinions upheld by the “official” historiography. Perhaps they were sparked by the general trend set by the attempts to rethink and deconstruct national mythology and national narrative from the perspective of liberalism and postmodernism. However, these “parahistorical” theories challenge the validity of academia, in all its varieties, and label all works produced by academics as an attempt “to conceal the truth about the history” of the Bulgarian people, or of any other Eastern European nation, for that matter.

The seeds of this manner of thinking could be found in the practice of totalitarian regimes to seek support in large-scale manipulation and falsification of the past. Therefore, studies in this area were under strong quasi-academic and political control. The official historiography played

an important role in the imposition of certain political directions, which it justified using more or less academic arguments. These circumstances, combined with the collapse of the old regime, led to a serious shaking of its authority after 1989.

Another factor to be taken into consideration is the total restructuring of the nationalist paradigm in the context of globalization, certain elements of the crisis of the nation-state, and the creation of “post-national constellation” (Habermas 1998). In Eastern Europe, the “parahistorical” discourse is largely the result of social and political changes that have caused much distress there. However, in other societies, it finds its expression as a result of the pressure brought about by the “world risk society” (Beck 1999).¹

This chapter is the result of a long period of research on the “parahistorical” discourse in Bulgaria, particularly that related to Proto-Bulgarian studies, one of the major fields in Bulgarian historiography, loaded with mythological elements, since its emergence in the nineteenth century. In the course of preliminary research, I encountered very similar manifestations in many historiographical and “parahistorical” publications throughout the region. Thus a comparative study of a number of paradigms frequently encountered in this type of publication would enable me to create a framework of interpretation for this phenomenon and would provide an answer to numerous questions. It would also create a typology of the messages propagated by these theories and help identify its intended audience. Moreover, such a study would help to understand the reasons behind the popular success of the “parahistorical” discourse and even its political influence among certain nationalistic organizations and circles.

Theories of Bulgarian “ethnogenesis” as a political tool

As mentioned earlier, Proto-Bulgarian studies in Bulgaria have already been investigated from this perspective. Issues such as the “ethnogenesis” of modern Bulgarians, the role played by the non-Slavic Bulgars in the

¹ The term “risk society,” coined in the 1980s, refers to “a society increasingly preoccupied with the future (and also with safety), which generates the notion of risk” (Giddens 1999, 3). Beck, who used the term in a few of his books, defines it “a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by *modernisation* itself” (Beck 1992, 21).

formation of the later Bulgarian ethnic community, and their role in the formation of medieval Bulgaria played a significant role not only in Bulgarian academic history but also in the formation of Bulgarian nationalism and the official ideology of modern Bulgaria. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, bitter disputes arose between supporters and opponents of the idea of Proto-Bulgarian dominance in early Bulgarian history. The supporters of this idea emphasized the key role played by the Bulgars in the historical process throughout the Middle Ages and attempted to link modern Bulgaria (as well as modern Bulgarians) to the Proto-Bulgarian heritage. The opponents of this idea emphasized the obvious linguistic and cultural affinity of modern Bulgarians with the wider Slavic community.

This debate emerged during the nineteenth century and involved not only Bulgarian scholars and intellectuals but also foreign academics. Johann Christian von Engel (1797), Yuri Venelin (1829), Konstantin Jireček (1876), Marin Drinov (1872, 210–238), and Gavril Krystevich (1869) are only a few of those who supported one stance or another in their works. The debate also reflected the political ambitions of Russia and Austro-Hungary in the Balkans, as each great power sought its own answer to the Eastern Question, that is acquiring the territories held by the Ottoman Empire.

A third theory emerged in the process, which stated that Bulgarians were, in fact, an autochthonous people of the Balkans, direct descendants of the Thraco-Illyrians and ancient Macedonians (who were regarded as non-Greeks), and thus possessing full rights to live in the Balkans side by side with their "prominent" Greek, Serbian, and Romanian neighbors and rivals.

The "Turko-Tatar" or Turkic theory for the origin of the Proto-Bulgars and modern Bulgarians was refuted by most Bulgarian historians and intellectuals in favor of the Slavic option. It was extremely popular, however, in Greece and Serbia, among certain nationalistic circles who tried to depict their Bulgarian neighbors as "Asiatic" and "barbarian" and thus not belonging to the "civilized Europeans."

In fact, Engel, who could be regarded as the founder of the "Turko-Tatar" theory, was a typical scholar of the late eighteenth century, even though he may have been influenced by some political objectives of the Habsburg Empire in the Balkans. His main point was that although modern Bulgarians belong to the Slavic linguistic community, their ancestors were a "Turko-Tatar" people. In his opinion, the general trend in the

history of the Bulgarians was the process of their Slavicization, linked with the activities of Cyril and Methodius and the process of Christianization in medieval Bulgaria. Nevertheless, Engel stated, even the modern Bulgarians, as “Tatar” descendants, were closer “by blood” to the Turks and the Hungarians than to the Serbians and the Russians. The only solution for them would be “liberation from the Turkish yoke... a human, European, Hungarian rule, in short: realization of the title King of Hungary and Bulgaria.” The obvious bias of Engel’s theory and the political awkwardness of a theory proposing close relations between the Bulgarian Christian *reaya* and their Ottoman masters meant Engel’s views could not hope to gain much popularity among Bulgarian intellectuals. The theory was, however, accepted and used as a propaganda tool by some nationalist voices among Bulgaria’s neighbors (Engel 1797, 60–61).

As already mentioned, the “Slavic theory” proposed for the origin of the Bulgarians enjoyed much more favor. This theory was rooted in the Slavic Renaissance tradition and in late medieval Bulgarian literature. In 1601, the Ragusan abbot Mauro Orbini stressed that the Bulgarians were Slavs whose distant origins were in Scandinavia and that they later migrated to the basin of the Volga River. There they accepted the name “Vulgarians,” and one branch of this people later migrated to the Balkans (Orbini 1601, 50). This portrayal of the early Bulgarian migrations was widely popular (especially the argument linking their name to the Volga) and went largely unchallenged until the twentieth century. This theory was embraced by Paisij Hilendarski, Spiridon Gabrovski, and other early “revivalist” authors among the Bulgarians. It has also received support from Jovan Raijć, a Serbian theologian and historian who compiled a history of “different Slavic nations, mostly the Bulgarians, the Croats and the Serbs.” Using generally linguistic arguments, Raijć supported the Slavic theory of the origin of the Bulgarians (not surprisingly, perhaps, as he was a Serb, while his father was a Bulgarian from Vidin). He refuted the “Turko-Tatar theory,” as well as the theories about the identity between the Bulgarians and the Vlachs (Romanians), also encountered in the works of several eighteenth-century German scholars (Raijć 1796, 72–76).

A radical approach to this topic may be found in the writings of Yuriy Venelin, a Ukrainian/Russian writer. Venelin not only declared the ancient Bulgarians and modern Bulgarians to be completely identical and to be Slavs but also presented them as a branch of the Russian nation

(Venelin 1829, 198–199). Venelin's theory was very influential among the Bulgarian intelligentsia during the first half of the nineteenth century. For example, it was embraced by Vasil Aprilov, a representative of the first wave of Bulgarian nationalists, confronting mostly Greek nationalism and the Greek cultural and ecclesiastical dominance among the Bulgarians.

The "Turko-Tatar" theory, however, gained support within some nationalist circles in Greece and Serbia, in an environment of competition among the corresponding nationalist movements. One of the main arguments of these circles in Greece was that the Proto-Bulgarians were a "wild Asiatic horde of nomadic invaders," while modern Bulgarians were a mere continuation of a barbarian mix of Slavs and Proto-Bulgars. Thus (the argument went) they did not belong to the family of European Christian nations, and their aspirations for influence in Macedonia and Thrace and for the restoration of their independent church and state were not worthy of support. One author went so far as to state that these claims also needed to be avoided because of the Pan-Slavist propaganda of Russia, which supported their aspirations against the "historical rights" of the "noble Hellenic race" (Kalostypis 1993, 107).

The Serbian views on this matter also presented the Proto-Bulgarians as wild "Tatars" who conquered a large group of Slavic (i.e., Serbian) tribes and created a mighty "barbarian" state during the early Middle Ages. These "Tatar-Bulgarians," however, reduced their ethnic presence to only the northeast corner of the Balkans (i.e., Dobrudža or Scythia Minor). The rest of the territory continued to be inhabited by Serbians or "Serbo-Bulgarians" (Milojević 1872).

Such theories provoked parallel "parahistorical" myths among the Bulgarian intellectuals and political leaders. Thus Georgi Rakovski, one of the first prominent Bulgarian writers, political leaders, and journalists, came up with the theory that the Bulgarians were an autochthonous population of the Balkans, known to the ancient writers as "Thracians" and "Macedonians." The Old Bulgarian language even preceded the Sanskrit language (in fact, he stated, all Indo-European, or Aryan, peoples originated from "Hindistan," but they migrated to Europe in prehistoric times). Consequently, Alexander the Great, Philip II, and even Aristotle were of Bulgarian origin, and Thracians, Macedonians, Slavs, and Bulgarians were simple synonyms (Rakovski 1984, 379–380).

The attempt at an academic debate on these matters among the Bulgarian intellectuals in the 1860s and 1870s brought about the clash

between Gavril Krystevich and Marin Drinov. The former, who was not only an intellectual but also a highly positioned Ottoman clerk, defended the view that the ancient Bulgarians were connected to the “Huns” and the Eurasian nomadic world. This theory implicitly supported some neo-Ottoman views, trying to integrate the Christian subjects of the Empire in the spirit of Tanzimat (Aretov 2006, 122–123; Stamatopoulos 2009, 146–182). Krystevich’s main opponent turned out to be Marin Drinov, a Bulgarian who taught at the universities of Harkov and Kiev. He fiercely attacked Krystevich’s views, proving that modern Bulgarians were Slavs whose ancestors migrated to the Balkans during late antiquity from what is now Russia (and who were thus closely related to the Russians). Even the small non-Slavic horde of the “Proto-Bulgars” migrated from the basin of the Volga and was quickly absorbed by the Slavic majority (Drinov 1872, 210–238). In his view, both Krystevich and Rakovki’s theories were total nonsense and deserved to be rejected. Drinov’s theory became extremely popular among the Bulgarians, and Slavic ancestry was greatly emphasized, at least until the first decade of the twentieth century, in tandem with the strong pro-Russian feelings harbored by many Bulgarians.

After the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), there was widespread disappointment with Pan-Slavism, Russia, and Serbia. Later, in the 1920s and the 1930s, the “Turanian” Proto-Bulgars were rehabilitated and gradually proclaimed to have been a “race of masters and creators of states,” a discourse readily appropriated by pro-Fascist and pro-Nazi politicians. “Iranian-Aryan” and “autochthonous” views and theories also re-emerged. However, they did not find significant support in academic circles.

The most influential proponent of the “Turanian” theory of the Proto-Bulgars’ origin was the famous linguist Stefan Mladenov. He was deeply convinced that the Proto-Bulgarian language was Turkic, belonging to the “Aryo-Altaic family.” The Bulgarian intelligentsia perceived this as undignified, as it clashed with their deeply rooted anti-Turkish feelings. Mladenov had to explain that “Aryo-Altaic” peoples were not Asiatic barbarians but mighty transmitters of the great civilization of China and the Far East to Eurasia and Europe (Mladenov 1928, 49–71).

Vasil Zlatarski, the leading figure in Bulgarian medieval studies, elaborated a complex theory uniting the “Hunno-Bulgars” and the Slavs as creators of medieval Bulgaria. However, he stressed the leading position of the Bulgars in this process and labeled them “state-creators.” Of course,

many in Bulgarian society found it hard to accept the idea of any lineage connecting the Proto-Bulgars and modern Bulgarians with the Turks, who were deemed "our oppressors for five long centuries" (Zlatarski 1928, 74–112). Thus some "parahistorical" ideas gained support in certain (mostly non-academic) circles. Gancho Tsenov, a historian with German training, rebelled against the "Vienna School" and tried to prove in numerous publications that the Bulgarians were an ancient race in Europe and Western Eurasia. He revived to a great extent the autochthonist theories of Rakovski (Tsenov 2005, 183).

Another writer, Dimitryr Syselov (an architect by education), fiercely opposed the "Turanian" theory, claiming that the ancient Bulgarians were highly civilized Indo-Europeans (Aryans) originating from Pamir (Syselov 2010, 515–588). During the 1930s and World War II, anti-Slavic rhetoric increased, and writers like Nikolay Sheytanov claimed that the "Bulgarian masters" had, in fact, exterminated the local Slavic population, just as the settlers in North America had done with the native Americans (Elenkov 1998, 120–140).

After World War II, defeated Bulgaria became part of the Soviet bloc. Soviet-Russian domination was total, at least in the beginning. A pro-Soviet neo-Pan-Slavism spread among the satellite states, and even non-Slavic countries like Hungary, Romania, and East Germany had to overemphasize the presence and the traces of Slavic minorities and Slavic culture within their territories. In this political context, it was easy for Bulgarian historians to rediscover the "Slavic" theory of the Bulgarian ethnogenesis. In this process, an important role was played by Soviet academic Nikolay Derzhavin. In his Marxist history of medieval Bulgaria, he minimized the role of the Proto-Bulgars as much as possible and, using the linguistic theory of N. Y. Marr about the "Yaphetic" linguistic community, proclaimed that even the ancient Thracians and Illyrians were Proto-Slavs, thus giving a new impetus to the autochthonic views (Derzhavin 1946).

In the 1970s, the time of "mature socialism," Bulgarian nationalism was revived, perhaps in a desperate attempt to consolidate the nation-state at a time when communist internationalism was in a state of crisis. There was an attempt to create a balanced, tripartite ethnogenetic theory, which depicted Slavs, Proto-Bulgars, and Thracians as equal partners in the process (Angelov 1981).

In the 1980s, the Turkic theory proposed for the origin of the Proto-Bulgarians was used extensively, in an attempt to prove that Bul-

garia's Turkish-speaking minority had a full Bulgarian pedigree and thus undoubtedly belonged to the Bulgarian ethnic group. In this respect, Strashimir Dimitrov, the leading scholar in Ottoman studies and Turkology, was extremely prolific. He made extensive claims that a group of "Hunnic-speaking" Bulgars had not been assimilated by the time of the Ottoman conquest and that they had been at the core of the so-called "Turkish-speaking" Bulgarians. As living proof of his theory, he invoked the small Gagauz minority (a Turkish-speaking but Orthodox community, often used to explain many linguistic, historical, and political experiments) (Dimitrov 1988, 46). All these theories were revived or refuted after the changes of 1989, when the monopoly of state-supported academia was challenged on all fronts.

The situation after 1989

Since 1989, Bulgarian nationalism has continued to live off warm reminiscences of the "Revival" ideology. Anti-Turkish rhetoric is now reflected in the theories that challenge the thesis of the Proto-Bulgars' Turkic origin. Alongside the "Iranian" or "Aryan" theory, there appeared arguments favoring an autochthonous origin. In parallel with the academic discussion on these issues, some extreme views emerged, often with political agendas, taking their final form in the activities of certain Internet forums, nationalist organizations, and "parahistory" groups.

Among the foundations that sponsor research in Proto-Bulgarian studies, Tangra TanNakRa is probably the most generous. It not only sponsors "parahistorical" publications but also seeks support in certain political circles (Vachkova 2008). For example, its lavishly printed volume, *Bulgarian Civilization*, released in 2007, was sponsored by the Ministry of Culture and was associated with celebrations devoted to Bulgaria's accession to the European Union that same year (Fol 2007).

In a sense, its publications partially reflect theories of official Bulgarian historiography, though colleagues have expressed objections to the theories popularized by this foundation. These "parahistorical" theories, often politically loaded and having almost nothing to do with objective academic research in Proto-Bulgarian studies, could be summarized thus:

1) Continuity theory. This line seeks to establish a complete continuity between ancient and modern Bulgarians. To this end, authors like Georgi Rakovski and Gancho Tsenov have been rediscovered. Their

"autochthonic" theories of the origin of the Bulgarians have been upheld as an alternative to the accepted "migratory" theories. Ancient Thracians and sometimes ancient Macedonians are considered simply ancestors of the later Bulgarians, and the continuity of modern Bulgarians is projected back to prehistoric times.

2) "Paleo-nationalism" and biblical nations. Another direction for the development of a "parahistorical" quest in Proto-Bulgarian studies is the field of etymology, where famous and infamous authors try to present the Bulgarian language as the mother of all European and indeed world languages. They find traces of Proto-Bulgarians in the Holy Scriptures, Mesopotamia, and Egypt (Mutafchiev 1995; Vylchev 2001).

3) "Aryan roots" and the "enigmatic Eurasian homeland." This group of authors is looking eagerly for the supposed homeland of the ancient Bulgarians (they dismiss the term "Proto-Bulgarians" as "unscientific") in the vast areas of Eurasia, perhaps by conscious or unconscious opposition to modern Bulgaria's pro-Western orientation. At the same time, with little regard for consistency, they also oppose the Turkic ("Turko-Tatar") theory, probably because this is in sharp contradiction with the anti-Turkish feelings shared by nationalistic circles (Dobrev 2005, 207).

4) Anti-Slavism. These theories reject or minimize, often aggressively, the affiliation of modern Bulgarians to the Slavic linguistic and cultural space. This direction is sometimes related to attempts to dissociate Bulgaria from its past as the most loyal Soviet satellite and to doctor its image in the eyes of its new Euro-Atlantic allies (Tsvetkov 1998, 26).

Possible parallels and general directions for further research

Of course, these passions are not typical of only the Bulgarian academic or quasi-academic milieu. Similar examples could be identified in Hungary, the former Yugoslavia, Russia, Slovakia, Romania, and even Germany. Essential are, however, the dimensions of this phenomenon that go beyond marginality in some countries. It fits in the paradigm of anti-globalization, widely accepted among these social groups that perceive themselves as victims of the rapid changes of recent decades.

My preliminary study of similar phenomena concentrated mostly on the former Yugoslavia (Macedonia/FYROM, Serbia, Croatia) and Russia. Thus one could identify some of the trends presented in Bulgaria, such as "Aryan-Iranian" theories (Croatia), autochthonism (Macedonia, Serbia),

and exceptionalism and propaganda about the “biblical” (i.e., extremely ancient) roots of a given nation (Macedonia, Serbia, Russia). In my opinion, it is also connected with the reshaping and constructing of new identities in the post-communist world, in a time of relative crisis of identities and values and in the midst of reconsidering some axiomatic views on nations, nation-states, and nationalism in the face of globalization.

In certain countries, such as Macedonia, the entire historical paradigm is being reconstructed. From a pan-Slavic concept about the South Slavic origin of modern Macedonians (strictly counterposed to “Tatar” Bulgarians), connecting them to the rest of the nations formerly included in the Yugoslav Federation, the new official historiographical trend emphasizes the ancient roots of modern Macedonians. It has caused a row with Greece, known popularly as “the dispute over the name” and has had strong political implications (Stefov 2003).

Similar “anti-Slavic” trends denying the common Yugoslav past may be found in Serbia (mostly in the theory of the deep local roots of the Serbs, projected back to the ancient Triballians, and the conspiracy theories accusing academia of hiding the truth about the Serbs’ glorious past) and Croatia (a strong emphasis on the theory of the Aryan/Iranian, thus non-Slavic, origin of the Croats).² Also extremely interesting is the process of reviving old ethnic and national identities and even creating brand-new ones, such as the Montenegrin (sharply counterposed to the Serbian), Bosniak (among the Bosnian Muslims but also among people of Sandžak and Gora), and Pomak (in Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey). In this respect, historical and “parahistorical” debates are extremely heated.

A characteristic example is the debate on the origin of the Pomaks. Besides older theories, which presented this Bulgarian-speaking Muslim community as either Islamicized Bulgarians or Slavicized Turks, there arose a variety of new theories, used by different circles in their attempt to gain influence among the Pomaks. Thus in Greek historiography, there are attempts to present the Pomaks as the autochthonous population of Thracian tribes, who had close cultural ties to the Hellenic world. According to others, they are descendants of Cuman and Pecheneg tribes (and thus of Turkic origin). The most extravagant theory turns them into descendants

² About the phenomenon in Serbia and Romania, see Jovanović and Radić (2009) and Boia (1997).

of alleged medieval Arab settlers (Theocharidis 1995). There is also a strong effort to extend the Bosniak identity to all Slavic-speaking Muslim groups in the Balkans, based on the historical tradition of the medieval Bosnian Kingdom and the local heretical Bogomil tradition, interpreted as a proto-Islamic phenomenon (Friedman 2011).

In general, "parahistory" and "paleonationalism" may have a stronger influence among societies with a democratic deficit and weaker social groups and among newly constructed ethnic or national communities in Eastern Europe. A broader project will attempt to analyze the process in a broader regional framework, on a comparative basis. This should not be restricted to the investigation of publications originating in academic or non-academic circles but should extend to coverage in the media, to Internet sites, and to the programs of political parties and organizations with a nationalist orientation.

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Contributors

Ștefan BOSOMITU has a doctorate in history from Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași. He is currently a researcher at the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile.

Neven BUDAK is a professor of Croatian medieval history and head of the medieval studies doctoral program at the University of Zagreb. He has published extensively on Croatian medieval history, medieval urban history, and Croatian historiography.

Liliana DEYANOVA is professor at the Department of Sociology, St. Kliment Ohridski Sofia University. Her research interests include social symbolism, myth and utopia, everyday life, collective memory, life-writing, and the sociology of personality. She has published extensively on the memory of communism and on Bulgarian historiography.

Claudia-Florentina DOBRE has a doctorate in history from Laval University, Québec (2007). She is currently the director of Centre for Memory and Identity Studies and an associate researcher at Regional Center of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences (CeReFREA), University of Bucharest. She has published extensively on the memory of Romanian commu-

nism and political persecution; museums, monuments, and memorials; and on everyday life under communism.

Gábor EGRY is senior research fellow at the Institute of Political History in Budapest and editor-in-chief of the peer-reviewed journal of political history *Múltunk* (Our Past). He has a doctorate from Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. He is the author of a few monographs and articles on the history of nationalism and national minorities in Central and Eastern Europe and the politics of identity.

Cristian Emilian GHIȚĂ has a PhD in classics and ancient history from the University of Exeter. His interests include Hellenistic studies, Asia Minor, and ancient warfare, Asiatic mythologies, cultural memory. He is the editor-in-chief of *MemoScapes. Romanian Journal of Memory and Identity Studies*.

Luciana Marioara JINGA is a researcher at the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile. She holds a joint doctorate from the University of Angers and the University of Iași (2011). Her research interests focus on gender studies and women's history, as well as the history of communist parties in Eastern Europe.

Alexander NIKOLOV is associate professor of medieval history at St. Kliment Ohridski Sofia University. His published work covers a diversity of topics in medieval studies, including medieval migrations and border societies, medieval conceptions of community and nation, and the uses and abuses of the medieval past in Bulgarian historiography.

Izabela SKÓRZYŃSKA is professor of history at the Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznań. She is the author of two monographs (in Polish), on students' theater in Poznań, 1953–1989, and on the alternative politics of memory in post-communist Poland. She has published extensively on historical memory and performance, historical civic education, and multiculturalism. Anna Maria WACHOWIAK is professor of sociology at the Higher School of Humanities, Szczecin. She has published extensively on various topics related to the sociology of family, interpersonal communication, gender studies, contemporary social theory and the methodology of social research, and the sociology of memory.

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